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Illustrator: Youta

13

Lazy
Dungeon
Master

VISIT...

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A detailed illustration of a young woman with long, wavy, light brown hair and large, expressive orange-brown eyes. She is wearing a large, dark purple witch's hat with a wide brim and a small green bell hanging from the side. Her outfit consists of a black, low-cut, long-sleeved dress with a high collar and a large, ornate gold brooch at the waist. She is sitting on a large, red, tufted cushioned chair. In her right hand, she holds a small, dark, cylindrical object, possibly a cigarette or a wand. In her left hand, she holds a small, dark-haired doll with a blue headband and a pink bow, which is holding a bouquet of pink roses. The background features a large, ornate, golden structure with a circular pattern, possibly a clock or a decorative wall. The overall style is anime-inspired with soft lighting and detailed shading.

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Dungeon Core 89
HAKU

"I HEARD THAT YOU SLEPT IN BED WITH ROKUKO."
A collar clicked as it was locked around my neck.

KEIMA, ENSLAVED?!



"COME AT ME!"

Champion of the Hell Tournament
CORE 50

DUNGEON CORE 666
AIDY

Aidy's Master
SEBAS

Slave Hero
WATARU

"NOW, SHALL WE
DANCE? ESCORT THE
GOOD MAN, SEBAS."

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Prologue

“So, Uzou. How long will it be before we can go back to Keima’s town?”

“...Who knows, Muzou. But it shouldn’t be too long before we’ve got enough money to pay him back.”

Uzou and Muzou were two C-Rank adventurer brothers that Keima had saved in the past. At the moment, they were working as hunters in a city within the Demon Realm—essentially, the Demon Realm version of adventurers. Reason being, the only adventurer work there was hunting monsters.

The bulk of work was done by undead monsters summoned by demons—the equivalent of nobles in the empire—which meant that outside of things like trade work and customer service, the only work available was hunting monsters. But both of those required too much training for adventurers to just do on the side.

Uzou and Muzou had been surprised at first to see skeletons pulling wagons and tilling fields, but thanks to that semi-automated labor, the people lived comfortable lives. It was questionable if those with such a demonic appearance should really be called “people,” though. Either way, the brothers got used to skeletons before long.

In any case, Uzou and Muzou were on their way back from the city after hunting some Iron Toads, which were frogs about fifty centimeters tall with hard skin. They had come to the Demon Realm on a quest after handing Keima his magic blade over a year ago. In the middle of their quest, they happened to save the life of a rich young demon, and ever since then they had lived as honored guests in the city ruled by that demon family.

During the rescue Uzou was badly wounded, and they covered the costs of his healing. The plan was for them to keep working until they could pay that back, but... they were taking their sweet time, which was why they had been there for over a year.

Incidentally, they reported the quest that brought them there as complete in a local Hunter's Guild office. It was a different organization from the Adventurer's Guild, but they did keep in contact with each other.

"Still, people of the Demon Realm aren't too different from humans from the empire, huh?" Muzou said.

"Yeah. I'm always caught off guard by how they look, but they're basically just humans with magic stones stuck in their body. And, heh. I heard you went drinking with a Witch, Muzou."

"Just a bit, just a bit. She turned me down, anyway. Said she only cares about magic."

"Hahaha! Feels good," Uzou said, cackling at Muzou getting rejected. It was revenge for when Muzou laughed at him for being rejected by the Harpy working at the bar.

It was then that a Werewolf walked over to them. "Yo. Finally back, newbies?"

It was Sukjira, one of their drinking buddies. He worked in a two-person party with Shironaga, a Weretiger. Uzou and Muzou had at first been thrown off by meeting a Werewolf and Weretiger, but upon noticing they were basically like humans that could transform into a (quite furry) wolf beastkin, they didn't feel too scared. It helped that Werewolves had magic stones in their hearts rather than somewhere visible.

"Hey, you listening, newbies?" Sukjira sniffed with his wolf nose.

"We've been here for more than a year, y'know. Isn't that right, Uzou?"

"Yeah. Feels like it's about time he calls us by our names, Muzou."

"Alright, good point. It's a bit much to keep calling you newbies forever. Uh, you're Uzou and you're Muzou, right?" Sukjira asked, rubbing his fluffy chin.

"Yup. And didja really have to ask? Shouldn't be too hard to figure out who's who. Am I right, Uzou?"

"Yeah. 'Specially since we're always calling each other by name, Muzou."

"Hey, don't get the wrong idea. I'm just tryin' to appreciate different cultures

here. Some people get ticked if you call them by their first name,” he said, reminding Uzou and Muzou that in the empire, nobles all had long names, and they only allowed those close to them to use nicknames or first names. He was probably thinking of something like that.

“Makes sense. But don’t worry. These are our real names. Not even a single letter missing from them. Right, Uzou?”

“Huh? You forgot my name’s actually Uzordat? Hah, just kidding. Our names are just our names, Sukjira.”

“Good then. C’mon, you two. Shironaga wants to talk.”

Uzou and Muzou followed after him, wondering what was up. Shironaga probably just wanted to spar again.

They passed through the well-built city, buildings as tall and finely crafted as the imperial capital, before reaching the training grounds where Shironaga was swinging a weighted wooden sword in the air.

“Ah! Finally, you’re here!”

“Yup. What’s up, Shironaga? Want to train some more?”

“Yeah, but something else’s going on today!” Shironaga replied, prompting Uzou and Muzou to tense up a bit. “Y’know about the tournament coming up, yeah? Well, you two are gonna join in too!” he exclaimed, which neither of them expected.

“Huh? Wait, hold up. By Fighter’s Tournament you mean the Hell Tournament? Whoa now, we’re just normal old C-Rank adventurers. Right, Uzou?”

“Yeah. Hell’s Arena has a bunch of real-deal tough guys not even you can beat, Shironaga. We’d be dead in a second.”

“Idiots! Why’re you giving up before you even start?! And the Hell Tournament is the one demons participate in! The Fighter’s Tournament’s different!”

So he said, but either way, there would be nothing but a bunch of strong foes participating in both.

“Look. I’m not sayin’ you have to win. You two would be lucky to get even two wins in the tournament.”

“So why should we join, then?” Uzou asked, and Shironaga was ready to answer.

“First of all, you’re visitors here, but you’re not accomplishing anything special. That’s not gonna help out the young master.”

“Ngh!”

“W-Well, yeah, we knew that ourselves,” Muzou replied. He and Uzou were living off the money they earned themselves, but they were still being given the status of honored guests. The only thing they had accomplished at all in the Demon Realm was rescuing the young demon upon arriving. Nothing after that was worth noting whatsoever. They were doing nice hunter work, but that was just a normal job here if you weren’t hunting huge monsters. In conclusion, Shironaga was saying they needed to go to a public tournament and show that they were still worth keeping around.

“Plus, it’ll be good experience. Am I right, Sukjira? You fought in last year’s tourney. How was it?”

“Hm? Oh, yeah. It was real good experience. Plus, the tourney officials will heal you back to full health as long as you don’t die—not to mention the prize money. I got five golds for beating the first three fights.”

Five golds. That much money would let Uzou and Muzou pay off their debt and go home with more to spare.

“You heard the man. If you both can get through your first two fights, you’ll have more than enough to pay off that debt of yours. There’s not much left anyway, yeah?”

They could show that they weren’t cowards just by participating in the tournament. They didn’t have to worry about getting hurt, either, as long as they survived. Winning earned them money.

Everything about the tournament seemed great. How could Uzou and Muzou refuse after all that?

“Not like we’d die for losing, right, Muzou?”

“Yeah, might as well give it a shot, Uzou.”

And so, the two brothers decided to fight in the Fighter’s Tournament.

“Muzou, how far do you think Keima would get if he fought in it?”

“Y’know, he might actually win and earn the right to fight in the Hell Tournament. Though Keima’s in Tsia, so no way is he gonna be fighting in a Demon Realm tournament.”

Perhaps due to being distracted by pointless musing, Shironaga trained them even harder than usual that day.

Chapter 1

Now that matters with Dragg, the town on the other side of Tsia's Tunnel, were settled, I could finally get some sleep. But it was the exact moment I relaxed and let my guard down that an agent of evil came for me. My brief moment of peace came to a swift close.

"Rokuko, sweetie, I came to see you."

"Sister! Hi!"

Indeed. Our inn's sponsor, Haku, gave us a surprise visit. She was boldly entering from the front door with her retainer Chloe at her side.

Haku was so divine that she was worshiped throughout the empire as the Ivory Goddess, and here she was visiting us. *Has it really been that long since we fought the Dungeon Battle with the rabbits? Or what, is she here to threaten me about something?*

Either way, it had been a long time since Haku last visited us. The grand suite was open, and we were always ready to serve her. We guided her to my parlor in the chief residence, ignoring the adventurers who had clasped their hands and begun praying at the sight of her. *I mean, I would like to take her straight to the grand suite, but I'm pretty sure she has some reason for coming here.*

We sat down in the parlor's sofas, with Rokuko sitting next to Haku (of course) while I sat facing them. The moment we were all seated, our head maid Kinue came in and silently set down cups of tea. Naturally, it was our highest quality tea made from dungeon-produced leaves, though most tea tasted the same to me.

"So, sister, what brings you here?" Rokuko asked after Haku had a sip of tea.

"My my. Well, Rokuko, I wish I could say I was just here to see you. But sadly, I am here to fulfill my promise from earlier. Chloe, please present the letter."

"Yes, milady. Please take this, Keima."

Despite not knowing what promise Haku was referring to, I accepted the wax-sealed letter and paper knife from Chloe. *Open it right now? Alright, alright. I sure am excited to see what's in here. Cut, cut, cut with the knife... Okay. Let's see here.*

"...Invitation to the Demon Realm's Hell Tournament?" I said aloud. That was what the letter was titled. If all she had for me was a letter, why couldn't she just send it through the [Ivory Beach]? No, way. She mentioned a promise. Could it be...?

"The grand prize for this tournament are the Divine Pajamas."

"Ah, that explains that."

Haku had promised to give me information on some of the Divine Bedding if I won the Dungeon Battle. That was no doubt the promise she was referring to.

"It was quite the struggle to get this information, I'll have you know. The Demon Realm and I are enemies, after all."

"...Will I need a permit to go to the Demon Realm?" I asked. If it was an enemy to the empire, I could imagine all sorts of tedious paperwork being needed at border stops between the two countries. It might even be the case that I wasn't even allowed to leave the country at all without Haku's permission.

But Haku shot that idea down with a smile. "No, everyone can go. One's safety is not guaranteed without permission, however."

"Isn't that same thing as needing permission...?"

"Not quite. Think of it like... It will be less likely for them to make trouble for those on official empire business."

If they did, the Demon Realm would be in trouble rather than the empire. According to Haku, the Demon Realm was almost entirely populated by hotblooded warriors like Aidy and Core 564. Anyone not sent on government business would get wrapped up in fights, and it was the kind of government where you could be enslaved by anyone you lost a fight to. But even those on business got wrapped up in fights too, apparently. Geez, that's terrifying. Being sent by a government only put a little political pressure on them.

“And so, Baron Goren, I will send you to the Demon Realm as an envoy of the empire to attend their Hell Tournament. Is that all well and good with you?” Haku asked, using the noble title that I had honestly forgotten I even had. In other words, I was a mere baron in her empire, and she would chop my head right off if I refused. Literally.

“Hm? Wait, sister. He’s going to attend the tournament, not fight in it?”

“Oh my. You noticed? Goodness, Rokuko, you are such a clever girl.” Haku patted Rokuko’s head.

The Hell Tournament consisted largely of monstrously strong Dungeon Cores of the Demon King faction, and rather than being Dungeon Battles, it consisted of duels of individual strength. Haku apparently didn’t think I had a chance in hell of winning after I revealed my tricks early on.

“As a legendary warrior that conquered a Dragon, you would surely go far, but the victory itself would be beyond your reach. You need only to observe the fighting,” she said. Naturally, that wasn’t just her taunting me by forcing me to watch someone else get the Divine Pajamas while I twiddled my thumbs. Rather, by attending the tournament as an envoy from the empire, I would be able to negotiate politically with whoever did win the Divine Pajamas.

In other words, out of pure good will, Haku was affording me an opportunity to acquire the Divine Pajamas. Though I couldn’t deny the possibility that if not for Rokuko noticing her sleight of hand, I might have been forced to participate, and then killed, in the fighting.

“I see. Thanks, Haku. I’ll take you up on this offer.”

“You are very welcome. Politically speaking, you will be attending to learn more about their culture. Take care not to scorn the honor of the Demon Realm, and to always keep a close eye on Rokuko.”

“Of course, of c—Wait, Rokuko’s coming with me?” I had thought for sure that I would be going alone. And look, even Rokuko was surprised.

“I get to go too?”

“It seems that Core 666 wishes to see you. Ahhh, believe me, if I had my way I would never let Rokuko go to such a violent, boorish country. It’s just that Core

6 gave me no opportunity to refuse in our negotiations.”

“Oh, Aidy? That explains that.”

Core 666, also known as Aidy, was Rokuko’s friend. She was doted upon by the Great Demon King Core 6, just like Rokuko was doted on by Haku. I had no idea what being doted on by that stern old man might entail, but apparently she was well-trained in Demon King style warfare. You can bet she was happy about that.

Y’know, maybe the empire and Demon Realm could end up as allies if Rokuko and Aidy formed their own alliance. Okay... That’s probably unrealistic.

“Rokuko, you, too, will be sent on cultural grounds. You may engage in as much cultural exchanging with Core 666 as you wish.”

“Yay! Thank you, Haku!”

Cultural exchange, huh? I guess drinking tea together could be considered a cultural exchange of sorts.

“Incidentally, I will send Misha to guard your dungeon while you are gone. Work her to the bone as you wish.”

“You don’t mind, Haku? She is the imperial capital’s guildmaster, despite everything.”

“It’s quite alright, Rokuko. All she does is take naps anyway.”

“That kind of reminds me of Keima, which makes me like her more.”

Funny, I was thinking the same thing. She and I get along just fine.

“Still, just what kind of place is the Demon Realm? Aidy’s only told me a little about it, but she said they have dance parties every single day,” Rokuko said.

“Dance parties? Ahhh, if Core 666 said that, she was referring to duels and brawls. That is why, if you were to sum up the Demon Realm in a single word, it would be the country of barbarians.”

Yeah, “barbaric” is a good word for them, I agreed silently.

“...Keima, I will be sending an agent of mine to protect Rokuko. I do hope you understand.”

“Er. Of course.”

And so, it was decided that Rokuko and I would be going to the Demon Realm.

“So, Haku. When will this field trip begin?”

“Two weeks from now. It will last for one month.”

Oh? A whole month starting two weeks from now, huh.

“To that end, I ask that you come to the imperial capital by the end of next week.”

“Alright,” I replied. We had plenty of time with half a month on our hands, but travel in this world was so slow that in normal terms she would have been informing us at the very last minute here. Not everyone can use {Teleport} or dungeon functions to travel quickly. *But well, Haku contacted us now knowing all that. We definitely have plenty of time here, since we can just go to the [Ivory Beach] then go to the capital from there.*

“Now, with official business settled... Ahem. Mmm?” Haku coughed and glanced Rokuko’s way.

“...Rokuko. You know what to do,” I said.

“Mhm. Come on, Sister. I’ll give you lots of hospitality!”

“Ahaha, I’m looking forward to it.”

Haku took Rokuko’s hand and let herself be guided away, a bright smile on her face. In the end, her stay was once again first-class, and the next morning she left an enormous tip before leaving sadly, saying she would be waiting for us the week after the next.

* * *

So yeah, we started to prepare for our little field trip. That said, we didn’t need to rush that much, even though we would be staying for an entire month.

“Cause I mean, DP can do pretty much everything.”

“Uh-huh. I guess that really just leaves Kinue’s cooking?”

We thought back to the journey to the imperial capital we had gone on with Wataru’s party. All we had to do were the same things we did then. After all, we

had the DP catalog, and as long as we had DP we could basically cheat and get anything we wanted. We could prepare the same things we had for the imperial capital trip, then buy anything we forgot with DP. It was pretty stress-free.

Incidentally, we could each bring one partner with us to the Demon Realm, for a total of two companions. Personally I would be bringing our strongest fighter, Niku, since she was an absolutely essential bodyguard. As for the other one, however...

“Masteeer, I wanna go to the Demon Realm tooooo,” Neruneh said, surprising everybody. “You haven’t settled on all the members yet, riiight?”

“Well. I was thinking of taking Ichika along since she went with us to the imperial capital, but... What do you think, Keima?” Rokuko asked.

“Can’t say I expected you to want to come, Neruneh. Is there some reason for that?” I asked, already knowing that Ichika would want to go to eat Demon Realm food.

“You seee, the Demon Realm is a hotspot for magic tool reseaaarch.”

The Demon Realm. The country of barbarians. Put simply, it was a country filled with year-round warfare. And what did warfare engender without fail? Indeed, the development of new technology. The fundamental connection between war and progress led to the Demon Realm having cutting edge technology for magic tools that could be used as instruments of death, and as a result even common citizens made frequent use of magic tools.

“The top magic tools of the empire are very incredible tooooo, but that’s mostly thanks to the Hero Workshop and alchemists, who keep their technology secreet. They’re on average a lot worse throughout the whole empiiire,” she explained. There was a big gap between the best and the worst magic tools in the empire, which the Demon Realm was filling in with readily available high-quality tools.

“In other words, you want to take this field trip seriously and learn from it.”

“Uh-huh, uh-huuuh! If you take meee, the results will show in all the magic tools I make from now ooon.”

Considering our party composition, Ichika would be the safest choice. Her

sociable personality would prove invaluable when we needed to follow our cover story of being there for a cultural exchange. No doubt she'd find all the best food in the whole Demon Realm too. She made our last trip a lot easier and filled with good food, so yeah.

"Keima, I think we should pick Neruneh this time."

"You think so?"

"Ichika's useful, but... This is a field trip for learning, isn't it?" Rokuko said, and that settled things on the spot. It was just a fact that Neruneh stood to gain a lot more from the Demon Realm than Ichika did. I also appreciated that she was motivated to pay us back by making better magic tools using what she learned. Not to mention, if Haku asked us to show we made use of our time abroad, we could just have Neruneh make a magic tool for us. *And I can pretty much guarantee Haku will try to give me hell for not learning anything on the trip, so yeah. Neruneh it is!*

"Good point. Magic tool technology will help the dungeon too."

"Okay. You're in, Neruneh, so get ready for the trip. Have you learned {Storage} yet? If not, I can give you a scroll for it."

"Yaaaay! Thank you, Rokuko! Master!"

And so, we decided on Neruneh being our final companion. Ichika would have to settle for whatever souvenirs we brought back. She seemed pretty sad about it, but since the food would be kept completely fresh in {Storage}, we could buy all sorts of food from stands for her. *Just look forward to our return. Yeah.*

"By the way, Rokuko. Are the shifts in the dungeon and inn going to be okay?" I asked when the thought struck me.

"Hm? Oh, I guess I will need to modify the schedule a bit. Let's see... Maybe now would be a good time to summon more administrative monsters? I think it would definitely be a good idea to summon at least one more monster to watch over the dungeon."

She had a point. As it stood, the dungeon was being run by Elulu the Elf Ghost, since she didn't need to rest or sleep, but at times she played with Igni from next door. *Undead monsters may not need rest, but Elulu used to be a normal,*

living person. Speaking as a Beddhist, it's important to respect her individuality and give her some time to rest.

And also, now that I think about everyone running the dungeon, isn't the current situation pretty bad? Rei is the High Priestess of Beddhism, Kinue is running the inn with the Silkies, and Neruneh is focusing on her research. Not to mention she's about to leave with us on this trip. There's Kosaki the ring Succubus, but I'm bringing her with me for protection against dream invasions, and then there's Siesta the Magic Blade, Rokuko's pets, the rats... Uh. Is there not a single proper Named monster in our entire dungeon? Should we bring Mr. Tent over here? No, wait, he's the boss of the [Ivory Beach].

...I feel that as the pope of Beddhism, it's my duty to let everyone get some more rest. Which means, yeah, we do want one more monster dedicated to running the dungeon.

"Rokuko, want to try rolling the gacha? Maybe we can just use whatever we get."

"Oh, good idea! Let's do it! But, um, which level of gacha should I pick?"

"Uhhh, the 10,000 DP one, I guess?"

"Well, fair enough. I wanted to try the 100,000 DP gacha again, but if we're spending that much we might as well buy another like Rei and the others. Let's just try it once and see what happens."

And so, we moved to the Master Room just to be safe. Any monster could be safely summoned here. Rokuko quickly opened the menu and reached for the 10,000 DP gacha.

Woosh! A magic circle spread out. No lightning this time; it was just a standard roll. We watched on, wondering if it would be the monster we wanted... and out came a panda.

"A black and white bear...?" Rokuko said.

"Yep... It's a panda." *A one meter tall panda. Welp... Guess this goes into the crowd of Rokuko's pets. And I guess as a bear it'll be good in a fight...? But why is it a panda?*

“Oh, Keima, this isn’t just any bear.”

“Hm? I mean, yeah, it’s a panda, but what about it?”

Rokuko pointed, and I finally noticed that there was a ten centimeter wide treasure chest on the end of its tail.

“It’s a mimic!”

“Hold on a second.” *Mimics are those monsters that pose as a chest and eat adventurers, right? So why is it a panda? And why is the treasure chest so ridiculously small? What is going on? What is even happening...?*

“Ah, Keima, look!”

“...Seriously?”

The panda entered the treasure chest before our eyes. Right into... the ten centimeter wide box. It just got sucked in like it was a whirlpool, and then the chest dropped to the floor.

That must be some Spacetime magic at work, I thought before picking it up. It fit in my palm, and didn’t feel heavy. But that was it. What’s the point in this thing? This... Mimic Panda?

“This is a bit too weird to use in the dungeon... Guess you’ve got yourself a new pet, Rokuko.”

“Oh, well, that’s nice. Ahaha, from today forth, you are... Puck!”

Ah, a combination of “panda” and “box” (bocks) I see. Pretty similar to “pack” as well, very clever. Definitely not pure coincidence.

And so, we failed to get a dungeon manager, but we did get a new pet for Rokuko. *Which means we need to get more manual with this.*

We opened the DP catalog to look for a dungeon monitoring monster. I looked through our options as Rokuko clicked the tiny chest with a monster inside open and closed. *Er... Can you stop that, Rokuko? You’re probably annoying the panda.* Though I know it’s funny to see it swoosh in and out of the box.

“...I feel like I kind of want a monster that just dryly manages the dungeon

without kicking up much of a fuss about it.”

“An intelligent monster, but one without strong feelings... Hmm, maybe a Ghost like Elulu?”

“I get the feeling that a lot of Ghost monsters just aren’t good at all.” Getting Elulu herself was like a jackpot, but the Ghost in Core 564’s dungeon was stupid enough to leave its own Boss Room.

“Anyway, since it will be managing the dungeon, the monster will be serving beneath Rei just like Elulu,” Rokuko observed, closing the Mimic Panda and shoving it into her pocket before sitting next to me to peer at the catalog.

“So you think we should get something that would work well with a Vampire?” Her sudden approach hit me with a wave of her sweet scent.

“Uuuh, if we look through other blood-sucking monsters we’ve got... an Ogre? Maybe one with intelligence?”

“I’m not so sure about that. I think a plain Oni would be better.”

“This Demon seems solid too. And of course they’re going to be intelligent. We would be in trouble if they weren’t.”

“It would be more trouble if they were ‘intelligent’ like Core 564, no? Oh, but there are a lot of customization options. I guess I shouldn’t expect anything less from Demons?” Rokuko said.

“This Rabbit Sage here’s definitely in our catalog thanks to Mikan. I wonder just how smart it really is,” I said.

“It’s possible it’s just smart for a rabbit. Let’s do something else.”

And so, after much discussion...

“Let’s just settle with a Fairy,” I said, feeling a bit defeated.

“Agreed...”

Size didn’t matter when it came to running the dungeon. Really, having a weaker monster that couldn’t serve as a Boss Monster would discourage them from throwing themselves at adventurers and potentially dying. As long as they had the intelligence to not go outside, they were fine. And the monster with the

highest ratio of “cheap cost” to “intelligence” ended up being Fairies.

How are they connected to Vampires? Uhhh, well, the wings? Meh, who cares. It doesn't matter.

All that said, we weren't summoning them just yet.

“They're gonna serve Rei, so let's give Rei the DP and have her summon them.”

“Agreed,” Rokuko said. “I think they'll listen to Rei more that way. I'm not sure why I think that, but it feels true. Though we'll have to tell her not to just use this DP on strengthening herself again.”

Might as well use this opportunity to give her enough DP to summon three whole monsters, then leave all the summoning and training to her. Yeah. I mean, it's just that Fairies have even more customization options than Vampires, so it'll probably be best to just let her do what feels right.

There were options for gender, height, existence of wings, and even expansion rate, whatever that meant. There were even elemental options on top of all that. *The only thing I know for sure is I want them to have 'Magic Talent,' since I want them to use {Create Golem} and stuff.*

“It's possible she gets so overwhelmed by the options that she doesn't summon anything before we leave for the trip,” Rokuko observed.

“We can just set a deadline. Not to mention naming them. We'll have to give the monsters menu access, after all.”

“Oh, right. That's important. They will be managing the dungeon, so.”

We couldn't grant someone the right to grant others menu access (at the moment, anyway). In other words, granting menu access was the only thing that only Rokuko or I could do. The monster had to be Named for it to work as well. We couldn't give admin access to a nameless mob monster.

We summoned Rei over to the Master Room and went over the situation with her.

“Direct subordinates, just for me?!” she exclaimed.

“Yep. We want them helping out with running the dungeon. Pick any Fairy

you like and summon them. Try to get it done before we leave for our trip.”

“Yes, Master! As you wish!” Rei shouted, giving a sharp salute. Rokuko gave her a handshake to give her the DP. Each fairy was about 15,000 DP, so we gave her 45,000 DP in total.

“I’ll go ahead and give you enough for three. Fairies have a lot of customization options, so just do what you can to make them fit for running the dungeon. Make sure they can be on good terms with Elulu.”

“Understood! This responsibility is heavy, but you may count on me!” Rei exclaimed. She seemed to be bubbling with joy.

Sure, consider yourself counted on. We’ve gotta focus on our upcoming trip anyway.

* * *

The next day, there were a ton of Fairies flying around in the Master Room. Some were red, some were blue, some were green, some were yellow... and one was bigger than the rest. Obviously, there were a lot more than three. *Isn’t this like, ten? Seriously?*

“...Uhhh. Seems like there’s a lot of these things.”

“There definitely is a lot,” Rokuko agreed.

“Master! Rokuko! I have long awaited your return!” Rei said, welcoming us with a smile.

“Care to explain yourself, Rei? Pretty sure I said to get three.”

“Oh, right. This big Fairy functions as a control tower for all the smaller, subservient Fairies!”

“So what, the big Fairy cost 15,000 DP and the rest cost 30,000? Did you buy a three-for-10,000-DP set?”

“No, in fact! Believe it or not, this is in truth all just one singular Fairy!”

“Oh?”

Apparently, the Fairies had a ‘Body Split’ option, and that allowed one base Fairy to split into ten different Fairies.

“If you use a skill scroll on the singular Fairy, all the Fairies it splits into can use the skill, so in my opinion it is very cost effective!”

“I see. Not a bad idea. Good thinking, Rei.”

“Yes, sir! Your praise is my greatest joy!” Rei said, her eyes shining with happiness over being praised. If she had a tail like Niku, no doubt it would be wagging incredibly hard right now.

“So, it all totaled up to 45,000 DP, huh?”

“Er, actually, it cost 50,000 DP... But it’s fine! I used my own savings to cover the difference!” Rei reported with a smile. *Whoa, whoa, whoa.*

“But that was your pay. This is for the dungeon. Here, let me pay for it.”

“No, no, no, no, I just did this on my own! Don’t worry about it!”

“I’d feel bad if I didn’t set this straight. Plus, you saved us DP long-term with the scroll costs, so yeah. Go ahead, Rokuko.”

“Okaaaay,” Rokuko replied, pinning Rei’s arms behind her so she couldn’t escape. Dungeon monsters couldn’t defy the Dungeon Core, but Rei had zero attack power so she was even more helpless than usual. And since both of Rokuko’s hands were filled, she couldn’t exchange the DP with a handshake like yesterday, so... she bit Rei’s earlobe to force the DP into her.



“Eep!”

“This happened because you didn’t just accept the DP, okay? Nom nom nom.”

“Ah, eep, R-Rokukooo!” Rei squeaked out, shutting her eyes tight and blushing red while trembling. *Getting DP involves, like, a low-frequency massage, so it feels kind of like being jolted with electricity... though it’s not really a big deal when you get used to it. And normally it’s on your hands, not your ears. Also, is it just me, or does Rokuko really like biting ears for some reason? Maybe I should lend her some goblin ears in the future...*

“Okay, there’s your 5,000 DP.”

“Nmm... Thank you very much! I overspent without permission, and yet you would still go so far for me...”

“Like I said, we’re actually saving money thanks to the scroll stuff. Heck, I’m even willing to give you a bonus. Is there anything you want? If it’s not something too expensive, I’ll get what I can for you.”

“Ah! Y-You don’t mind?!” Rei said with a beaming smile.

Yeah, I think I’ll go up to like, 10,000 DP for her.

“I-In that case... I request the honor of being your dakimakura as well, Master! Ah... Forgive me, it is not my place to even suggest that! Ahem, may I instead ask for an old, used jersey of yours...?!”

“Uh, what?!” Rei asked for something so totally outside of my expectations that I just froze in place.

“Oh, I have some of those on hand. You can have one.”

“Again, what?!” I exclaimed. Rokuko’s reply was also outside of my expectations.

“Yes, ma’am! I am grateful beyond words!”

“Ahaha. Keep up the good work.”

“Sorry, you two, but could you hold on for a second? Pause, please?” I stepped forward to stop Rei and Rokuko. *What’s all this about it being honorable to be my dakimakura? Has Niku been bragging about it...?*

Explanation, please.

“Hm? Master, to be your dakimakura is to serve you in your most defenseless state. It is a position that demands your utmost faith and trust,” Rei explained.

Ah. Okay. That’s how they’re seeing it. A job that’s basically the pinnacle of being trusted. Right. Now that she mentions it, dakimakura work really is the best representation of faith that one could ask for.

“Okay, next. Why my jersey?”

“So I can make a life-size doll of you to use as a makeshift dakimakura, what else? I need practice for the future.”

...Ah. Why are you looking at me like that should be obvious? It really, really isn’t.

“Okay, next. Rokuko, why do you have a stash of my old jerseys? You stole the ones I threw away, didn’t you?”

“...I have the right to remain silent.”

...Ah. Okay. That sure is some interesting phrasing you’ve learned, Rokuko. I won’t think too hard about it.

“Alrighty then. Anyway, we need to give the Fairy administrative authority. Rei, teach it what it needs to know and give it a name. It’s your subordinate.”

“Y-Yes sir! You may count on me!”

Alright. I’m tired of thinking, so I’ll just let Rei handle the naming and everything.

“Um, actually, regarding the name, I thought of one ahead of time! May I go ahead and use it?”

“Hm? Wow, you work fast. What’s the name?”

“Yes, sir! It’s Echo Re Alpha Phantom Queen of Fairies Crystia Famrade Troll Killer Hob Gob Mezzaluna Quintet Cell Division Netero Bazalzus Driano Dreano Polka!”

“...Is that a list of names for all the split Fairies?”

“No, it’s one name for the big Fairy.”

“Heck no! It’s too long!” What kind of name fills out an entire sentence by itself? I’d never remember that, and I’m pretty sure it wouldn’t even fit on the Named monster display list. Though now I want to see what happens there...

“Ngh... I see, it’s too long. I-I certainly felt that it might be a little excessive.”

“And you just went with it anyway...?”

“Well, yes... Ahaha.”

It was then that we noticed Rokuko staring intently at Rei.

“Wh-What is it, Rokuko?”

“...Rei, did you stay up all night doing this?”

“Ngh! F-Forgive me! I did what no High Priestess of Beddhism should ever do...!”

...Ahhh, I see. This kinda thing definitely happens when you stay up all night. I can hardly blame her.

“Good grief, you going bonkers when you don’t sleep is just like Keima.”

“...And her wanting my old clothes is just like you, huh?”

“Okay, enough! We’re done talking about this!”

Hey, you brought it up. But alright.

“Rei, we can’t give it administrative powers if it doesn’t have a name, so hurry and give it one. But uh, tell us what it is before you do. Okay?”

“Y-Yes, Master.”

That should do for now. Once the Fairy has a name, the dungeon should be all set.

* * *

By the next day we had settled on a name, and a quick check on the menu confirmed we had successfully given her several administrative powers. Naturally, we didn’t just give her everything. She was a newbie, after all. She would have to work hard under Rei and Elulu to build up trust. Pretty sure Rei would do just fine with that. Given how the Fairy sweetened up to her in no

time, having Rei summon her had been the right idea. Yeah.

“Speaking of which, Misha’s being sent over here tomorrow, right? We’re gonna need to prepare for that... Oh, maybe she can just stay in the grand suite?”

We would be leaving the dungeon and beginning our trip once Misha arrived to see us off. Incidentally, as far as the public was concerned, Rokuko, Niku, Neruneh, and I had already left town for the imperial capital. On the surface this was supposed to be a normal cultural exchange, but really, it didn’t make sense for the town chief of a newly-founded border town to be sent on a diplomatic cultural exchange. Not that anyone in town found it suspicious at all. In fact...

“Heya, town chief! Finished plans for your honeymoon trip?”

“Oh, Your Holiness. Going on a trip with the wife? Have a good time, my man!”

“Here you are, Keima. You may not need this, but here is a charm to increase the likelihood of successful conception.”

Yeah. For some reason, everyone in town treated it like we were newlyweds going off on a honeymoon. But why? They hadn’t acted that way when we left for the imperial capital before.

In any case, we had publicly left town, so I was staying shut inside. No need to hear all the teasing of the town citizens.

“Yo, Master! The wifey’s calling!”

“You too, Ichika?! Are you behind all this?!”

“Nah, I’m just messing around. Everyone’s been teasing the heck out of you and I wanted in on the fun.”

Apparently our “honeymoon” was still the talk of the town. Why was that even happening? *If Misha hears this, Haku’s gonna hear it too... Gah, seriously, why is this happening? I’m not going with just Rokuko! Niku and Neruneh are coming too!*

“I mean, Niku and Neruneh are totally like maids, right? You two are the big

shots here, of course people are gonna look at it like this. Don't worry, I'm sure Haku's just gonna shrug it off. Might be a little annoyed, though."

"But this didn't happen when we went to the imperial capital."

"That's 'cause you had Wataru's Team Bacchus and the imperial princess with you."

Ah. This time, Rokuko and I are the only big players going on the trip. I didn't notice at all... Y'know, it feels like I've kinda been off my game lately. I think I need to be more careful and keep a sharp eye out for this kinda thing. I mean, sheesh, if I let my guard down here, I might just die. What am I even doing? {Ultra Transformation} giving me extra lives has seriously not had a good impact on my self-preservation instincts. Alright. Starting now, I'm gonna be a lot more careful.

I reached Rokuko's room right as I came to that conclusion. *Uhhh, so yeah, Ichika was saying something about me not needing to knock before going in. That's pretty obviously a trap.*

"...Heeey, Rokuko, I'm coming in."

"Ah, h-hey, wait a second!"

I opened the door slightly, then shut it as soon as I heard Rokuko cry out. *Heh. That would have been bad if I wasn't paying attention.*

"...Um, hello? Why didn't you come inside?"

"You said to wait, and so I did. What, did you want me to go inside?"

"I mean... No! No, but yes!"

"Now you're just talking nonsense. Having some head problems, Rokuko?"

In any case, I waited a bit, then went inside. Rokuko was sitting in a chair that was turned to face the door.

"What're you planning?"

"Ummm, w-well, it doesn't have anything to do with you, so just don't worry about it."

Seriously, what's she planning? I thought, at which point I noticed a manga

volume lying on the floor. *Wait... I'm pretty sure this is an ecchi series where the dude walks in on girls changing all the time. Alright, I get it. That's the trap she was aiming for... Wait. Don't tell me. Is Rokuko the one spreading the rumors of us being a married couple going on a honeymoon? Let me try to trick her into spilling the beans.*

"Rokuko."

"Uh-huh?"

"My head will roll if Haku hears these rumors about us being a couple. The heck are you thinking?"

"...Keima, Haku's a good person. She wouldn't do anything that serious."

"She may be nice to you, but she's not nice to me at all!"

Rokuko puffed out her cheeks in a pout. I poked them, causing her to blow out air. *Okay, she's not denying spreading the rumors. That basically confirms she's behind them.*

"So, why are you passing this off as us going on a honeymoon?"

"Well... I read a manga called *Sweet Honeymoon!*"

Pretty sure there aren't any H-manga in the catalog, so it was probably an actual story about a couple going on a honeymoon.

"You don't want to go on a honeymoon?"

"That's something you do after getting married."

"Marry me then, Keima."

"I'm a bit too terrified of Haku for that."

"Geez! And that's why I have to come up with all these plots, okay? Do you get why I have to fill your moat myself? Do you feel my struggle here?!" Rokuko demanded while gently hitting my chest.

"Look, we've been through this! You're *digging out* the moat here, not filling it in! If you want me to go through with it, get Haku's permission first! Do that and I'll do whatever you want, even get married!"

"Don't think I didn't hear that, Keima! If I get Haku's permission we're getting

married on the spot now, okay?!”

Huh?! Wait, how’d the conversation go in that direction?

“You heard that, right, Misha?!”

“Yuppers! I heard every word, Rokuko,” Misha said, popping her head out from behind the door with her ears wagging. *Wait, when did she get there? Er, also, uh, wait. She heard? She was listening? Why? What?*



Despite my panic, I managed to stay cool. “H-Heya, Misha. Already here, huh?”

“Been a while, buddy! Ahaha, I just thought I’d pop in a little early,” she replied with a grin and a wave. I waved back with a cold sweat running down my back. “By the way, Rokuko. What was all that about digging moats and stuff?”

“It’s Japanese slang, by which I mean, language from Keima’s world. It’s kinda hard to explain, but like... Imagine a moat. Filling the moat leaves them vulnerable, and digging it makes them stronger. I’m trying to fill his moat to make him mine.”

“Oooh, so it’s like breaking the castle walls. Good to know, Rokuko!”

I mean, does that really matter here? Misha hearing us means Haku’s gonna know that I’m willing to marry Rokuko... Oh, but maybe I’m safe since Rokuko was actively proposing to me?

“Anyway, that was one big leap for me! Mwahaha, now all I need is Haku’s permission and I can marry Keima. What do you think, Misha? Was my brilliant plan not perfect in every way?”

“Umm, sure! Very good plan. Good luck, Rokuko. I can’t help you, so all I can say is... Keima? It was nice knowing you.”

...Ah. I’m going to get assassinated during this trip, aren’t I?

“Just saying, I have a really weird purr-oblem, where I forget stuff when I eat something really tasty,” Misha said with a grin.

“Ngh... Fine. Have some hamburgers.”

“That’s what I like to hear!”

After bribing Misha with one hundred hamburgers, it was time to leave for the Demon Realm. We would be leaving through the Master Room and taking Niku and Neruneh with us to the [Ivory Beach], where a carriage prepared by Haku would take us to the imperial capital.

“It’s nice that Niku can travel using dungeon functions too,” Rokuko observed.

“Yup. Slaves are items, after all.”

“Uh-huh!”

Don't ask, it's a long story. The fact that Haku didn't say anything about us traveling with Niku probably means it's a normal thing to do.

Ichika and Rei were seeing us off. The Fairies that had already been given work by Rei and Elulu were fluttering around the Master Room as well.

“I trust the dungeon to you, Ichika,” Niku said.

“You got it, Niku. Bring back some tasty grub for me,” Ichika replied with a casual wave.

“Okaaaay, I'll be off nooooow.”

“Serve Master well, Neruneh! And Master, Rokuko, please enjoy your time together!” Rei said with a sharp salute.

“Alright, Rokuko. Let's go,” I said.

“Okaaaay,” Rokuko replied, and with a flick of the menu we were instantly transported to the beach. It was the surface level of our sub-dungeon, the [Ivory Beach]. We appeared out of thin air, but we were greeted by a slimy sea anemone-looking thing... Mr. Tent.

He welcomed us with some wiggles of his tentacles. “Sorry, but we're going right to the imperial capital,” I replied, but Mr. Tent wrapped his tentacles around my torso and lifted me up.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, quit it, hah! Rokuko and the others are watching!”

“(Wiggle Wiggle!)”

I patted Mr. Tent like I would a happy dog. Eventually, he regretfully let go of me. After cleaning myself with {Purification}, I returned to the others.

“Hm? What's up, Rokuko? You're blushing.”

“You sure are close with Mr. Tent, aren't you?”

“Yeah. I sometimes drop by to hang out,” I replied. To be precise, I dropped by when I wanted to nap on the beach while listening to the sounds of the waves. Sometimes I would sleep on Mr. Tent like a big waterbed, and

sometimes we'd play volleyball together.

...And now that I say that, I see Niku wagging her tail jealously while looking at me. I should play with her next time I come here. Yeah.

"Anyway, we've gotta get going to the capital. See you next time," I said, and Mr. Tent wiggled his tentacles a bit sadly. He also gave me some of the handmade salt he had created from the ocean. The Succubi had mentioned wanting more of this pink salt, so they would probably be happy to get it when we returned home.

"What a cutie. Hahaha."

"...Masteeer, I'm impressed you know what Mr. Tent is sayiiiing."

"Hm?" I replied, and a quick look revealed that nobody else understood him at all. Igni had said the same thing. Was he really that hard to get?

"C'mon, it's not that hard. It's just like if Niku had a bunch of different tails."

"They kind of just look like they're randomly wiggling aroooound."

"I don't get it either," Rokuko said.

"Me neither," Niku agreed.

Both Rokuko and Niku looked just as confused as Neruneh did. *Oh, and by that I mean Niku's tail is kind of swirling. She's still expressionless. I dunno, it just seems obvious to me.*

After saying goodbye to Mr. Tent, we dropped by the [Ivory Secret Spot] next door. It was a small dungeon built directly on top of the beach, and basically was just a vacation villa for Haku.

"We've been waiting for you," a Silky said with a bow of her head. She was the dungeon's administrator, and we would be getting the carriage from her. *I could just {Teleport}, but the mana drain when there's four people is pretty intense. Haku could have welcomed us at the beach herself, but maybe she's so busy setting up the trip that she couldn't spare the time.*

"I think it's safe to say that Haku already knows we're here?" I asked.

"Yes. Sadly, she is too busy with work to see you herself right now. Will you

be departing at once?”

“Yeah, I think so. The sooner we get there the better.”

And so, we got into the box carriage for nobles and headed to the imperial capital. *Or, actually... Is this one for the royal family? It's crazy comfortable. I could actually just lay down and sleep in it. There's the Silky driving it, after all. Should she even be leaving the dungeon when she's supposedly the dungeon boss? Meh, I guess it won't be a problem since Haku can just place her back there once we get back to the dungeon. Yeah.*

“Keima, want me to give you a lap pillow?” Rokuko said out of nowhere, with she and I sitting next to each other while Neruneh and Niku sat on the other seat across from us. *Oh?*

“You don't mind? Then allow me to... refuse, because this is Haku's carriage.”

“Why worry so much? Lap pillows are basically like hugs. Actually, it's even more casual than a hug.”

“There is nothing less true than what you just said. Neruneh, back me up.”

“Hmmm? I think it's fiiine. What about you, Nikuuu?”

“I believe me serving as a dakimakura will solve everything.”

...These carriage benches are a bit too lacking in space for that.

“Okay, I'll compromise and say Neruneh can give you a lap pillow. I'll look at your sleeping face from the other side of the carriage. Come here, Niku.”

“Okaaaay. Master, here you gooo,” Neruneh said.

“As you wish,” Niku replied.

“Hold it, hold it. That's not a compromise at all, and I'm not gonna be able to sleep with you staring at my face anyway. Why are you all moving around like I agreed to this? I didn't agree,” I protested, but nevertheless we swapped places in the carriages and my head ended up on Neruneh's lap. *Oh, this is pretty good. Neruneh's lap pillow feels a lot more comfy than I expected.*

“...Feels good, doesn't it?” Rokuko said.

“Er, well, how should I put this... Yes,” I replied. Her soft yet springy thighs

had the perfect height and warmth for me. She smelled nice too, somehow. It was a kind of earthy smell, maybe because she had been kneading clay recently to make magic tools.

“Niku, give me a lap pillow too!”

“As you wish,” Niku replied, and suddenly Rokuko was resting her head on Niku’s pillow on the opposing bench. The result was us both lying down and making eye contact... At which point she grinned.

“Ahhh... This feels nice. She smells nice, too. Niku, I think Keima’s scent has rubbed onto you since he’s always using you as a dakimakura.”

“Wait, my scent? But I’m going into the onsen every day and using {Purification}.”

“It’s seeped into your futon, so it’s probably seeped into your dakimakura too.”

“...I guess that’s pretty airtight logic. Uh, sorry, Niku?”

“Master, you marking me with your smell is a source of pride.”

Ah. I can tell she genuinely means that. Her tail is trembling with emotion beneath her.

“Ahhh, I just realized somethiiiing. May I say iiit?” Neruneh asked while absentmindedly stroking my head.

“Hm? What’s up?”

“Is this technically considered you and Rokuko sleeping togeeeether? Slaves and servants don’t count as people for nobleees, soooo, right noooow, you’re resting on lap pillows and facing each other while having pillow taaaalk.”

I didn’t think of it like that!

“Nah, I mean, there’s the whole middle part of the carriage between us!”

“Aaaah, don’t sit up so suddenlyyy. The carriage will roooock.”

Gah, she’s holding my head down so I can’t sit up...! And oh man, Rokuko is grinning like crazy on the other side.

“Ahaha, pillow talk with Keima! Neruneeeh, keep holding him down.”

“As you wish, Rokukooo,” Neruneh replied, and suddenly something soft was resting on top of my ear.

“Uh, Neruneh?”

“Ahaha. You can order me to stop if you don’t like thiiiis, Masteeer. But I know you dooooo. I knooooow. It’s fiiine, you can just say Rokuko and I forced yooou. You’re so kind you couldn’t force yourself to order me arooound. I understaaand,” Neruneh whispered in a quiet voice only I could hear, tickling my ears.

“Ngh...!”

“Do you know what people like you are called, Masteeer? Indecisiive, virgiiins. Ahahahaaa.”

N-Neruneh, what the hell?! Are you leveling up in sadism from bullying Wataru all the time?!

“Hm? Did you say something, Neruneh?” Rokuko asked.

“Nothing importaaant. I was just telling Master he gets embarrassed eaaaasily.”

“Oh, okay. Ahaha. Me and Keima, having pillow taaalk.”

“Like I said, this isn’t pillow talk.”

And so, I was stuck laying down in the carriage with Rokuko grinning at me until we reached the capital. *At least I got to sit up before we actually got there.*

* * *

We moved fast once we got to the capital.

First we went to the castle and had an audience with the emperor. We were allowed in on sight without being made to wait at all. As I pondered whether that was Rokuko’s influence, we quickly finished our greetings and audience. All I had to do was bow my head as Emperor Lionel wished me well in learning much of Demon Realm culture. And where was Rokuko? Off having tea with Haku. *Funny, considering how important this is. Or maybe she was talking directly to Haku precisely because this is so important.*

Anyway, by the end of the day we would be going to the Demon Realm in a train of carriages alongside other delegates. It was a very speedy departure indeed.

“Oh, so it’s not just us going on the trip, sister?” Rokuko asked.

“Quite. Naturally that would be far too suspicious. Not to mention, there’s already a group I’ve sent to the Demon Realm.”

“Wow. Won’t this be fun, Keima?”

“Y-Yeah, sure.”

Haku was riding our carriage. Or rather, we were riding Haku’s carriage. And by “we” I mean Rokuko, Haku, and I. Niku and Neruneh were in another carriage.

...Yeah, I’m not gonna get any lap pillows here. Also, Rokuko and I sitting next to each other with Haku facing us is probably a bad idea. She’s basically radiating pressure. Ah, but since this carriage has fine chairs, we’re an entire forty centimeters apart! Our hands don’t even graze each other when the carriage bounces a little! It’s fine. And also, this carriage doesn’t bump at all.

“By the way,” Rokuko said, “Aidy told me that the Demon Realm has a Hunter’s Guild.”

“Indeed. It’s an organization in the Demon Realm modeled after my Adventurer’s Guild. I taught them how to build and run it just fine.”

The Hunter’s Guild was the equivalent of the Adventurer’s Guild in the Demon Realm. We would have some degree of status within it thanks to being B-Rank adventurers. Though naturally, the Hunter’s Guild demanded so much more combat prowess that we’d be more prone to getting into fights. All Haku had to say about that was: Good luck. And that it would be especially bad since Rokuko and I looked weak on the outside.

“Wow, so the Demon Realm and the empire have been diplomatically involved for a while, huh?” Rokuko observed.

“We’ve existed next to each other for a long time, though most of our diplomatic exchanges have been in the form of warfare. I send delegates like

this over there once every few years as a form of cultural exchange.”

“Wow, that’s kind of amazing! Right, Keima?”

“Y-Yup.”

Incidentally, the demonic capital was surprisingly close to the imperial capital—both were reasonably close to the border. But that was just because they had been stuck in the same place ever since being built five hundred years ago.

Historically speaking, Corky, Donsama, Tsia, and Pavella were all duchies or undeveloped territory of other kingdoms. They became duchies of the empire through war, pillaging, and conquest followed by development. The fact the historical events could be summarized as “war and conquest” was a reminder that this was an *empire* we were talking about. But anyway, their territory grew in opposite directions, and the end result was their capitals being right next to each other.

We knew the behind-the-scenes circumstances, they couldn’t move the capitals due to their dungeons being there, but outsiders probably wondered why they had their capitals within glaring distance of each other. Or maybe it seemed like they were acting tough, refusing to move capitals if the other side wasn’t going to move theirs.

“Sister, do other countries have Adventurer’s Guilds?”

“Daide, the Holy Kingdom, and Wakoku all have Adventurer’s Guilds, though the one in the Holy Kingdom is more of a guild for dungeon conquering specialists.”

“Ah. That reminds me, Alca the High Priestess came by recently. Is she a member of the Holy Kingdom’s guild?”

“That’s right, Rokuko. She’s the highest rank in the dungeon conquering guild—the equivalent to our S-Rank. Though I had intended for her to never enter my empire again...”

Apparently Haku had remade the agreement such that the High Priestess couldn’t enter even if she died, changed her name, and became an entirely new person. *Yeah, to be fair, she really had illegally entered the empire.*

“With that in mind, you may kill her on sight if you see her in the empire. That includes her servant.”

“Okay, sister. If we can kill her we will. Right, Keima?”

“R-Right.” *This time for sure, I’m done with that insane High Priestess for good... Hopefully. Though it wouldn’t be odd at all for her to barge into the empire, prepared to die. That’s terrifying.*

“So, Rokuko. It’s a bit late for this, but are you truly ready to go to the Demon Realm? This is your last chance to turn back.”

“I’m going, sister. My friend Aidy wants to see me, after all.”

“Oh my, you look happy. Ahaha, my sweet little Rokuko, finally making her first friend... But don’t get too close to her, understand? The Demon Realm and the Laverio Empire are often at war with each other, remember.”

“Okaaay. You be careful too, Keima.”

“R-Right.”

...Are we going to be stuck like this until we reach the Demon Realm? I feel a bit out of place and would like to go to a different carriage. Oh, I can’t? Oh...

“Errr, by the way, Haku. Is it possible to sleep in this carriage?”

“You’ll have to lean back and sleep against the chair. Would you like a blanket? Or rather, I suppose you don’t need one when you have the Divine Bedding.”

“Actually, both the Divine Comforter and the Divine Quilt are Rokuko’s, so I’m kind of stuck. I’ll borrow a normal one if you don’t mind.”

“Oh my, I see. I suppose the only one you own yourself is the Divine Alarm Clock indeed,” Haku replied before snapping her fingers. Chloe appeared out of nowhere with a blanket in hand, which I took while wondering where she had come from. A second later, she had vanished again. *Is there just a hidden magic room for servants in the carriage? I guess that’s Haku’s carriage for you.*

“So yeah, I’m gonna sleep. Have fun talking with Haku, Rokuko. This’ll probably be the last time you two get to see each other for a while,” I said before leaning back against the chair and covering myself with the blanket.

“That’s true. Sister, do you mind if I sit with you?”

“Hm? Oh, but this chair only seats one... Unfortunately,” Haku said, seeming as if she truly did regret that from the bottom of her heart. Rokuko, however, kept up the attack.

“Can I sit on your lap, then?”

“Ah?! Y-You don’t mind? F-Feel free!”

“Okay. Here I go.”

Whoa. Is it just me, or has Rokuko been way more aggressive lately? Either way, I decided to go to sleep while watching Rokuko sit on Haku’s lap. My plan had been to just fake sleeping since I was terrified of being so defenseless in Haku’s presence, but with Chloe the Succubus around I would be found out instantly. I had no choice but to steel my resolve and just do it. I guess I can relax a little since Rokuko would stake her life on protecting me from Haku. Alright. I’m counting on you, Rokuko.

...Now that I think about it, does Chloe protect Haku at night too? Kind of like me keeping my ring Succubus around at all times. I’m kinda curious now, but I’m just gonna sleep until we reach a place to set up camp. Then I will continue to sleep. Oyasuminasai.

* * *

For one week I lived in a cycle of napping in carriages during the day and sleeping in tents at night, until eventually we reached a Demon Realm city.

“Whew. Finally, I can sleep in an actual bed again,” I said.

“Good work, Keima. But you could have slept inside the carriage with us at night, you know,” Rokuko said.

“Sorry, but I don’t have the courage to full-on sleep while you and Haku are talking.”

Incidentally, there were no inn towns along the road to the Demon Realm, since everyone who tried making one got wrapped up in their wars and died. But while Haku’s carriage had bedding built into it, that was where Haku and Rokuko slept. Men like me were just naturally forced outside.

Oh, and some bandits attacked us on the road, but we were fine. The delegates Haku provided were all warriors as well. Apparently you had to be pretty strong to be sent to the Demon Realm at all, since weak people would just be attacked and killed on the spot. Which brings me to the fact that Demon Realm bandits are pretty insane. They attacked a carriage train obviously sent by a high-ranking Laverio Empire figure... Hard to say whether they had big balls or small brains.

By the way, it seemed to me that Niku was the most effective fighter out of all of them. It only took a few days for everyone to start calling her the Decapitation Puppy. *Can you figure out why? I think you can.*

“Sigh. There is nothing more depressing than the knowledge that my sweet little Rokuko will soon be in the care of that miserable old man,” Haku murmured as we reached the city. And by city, I meant the demonic capital itself. It was very lively, maybe due to the Hell Tournament that was being held. The buildings really resembled the imperial capital, though that was partially thanks to similar material being used for both. The big difference was the population’s appearance. Demon Realm citizens had much more of a monster streak to them—Lizardmen wearing armor, Harpies carrying letters, and a bunch of beastmen that had very thick fur over their whole bodies.

Seems like there’s a lot more variety with skin color too, compared to the empire. Plus, I’m noticing a lot of hot-blooded looks through the glass—though it might just be people wanting to pick a fight with this carriage in particular.

“So this is the Demon Realm, huh?” I muttered.

“Indeed. The one and only,” Haku replied in a somewhat tired tone. I didn’t have anything to say to that, so I just nodded.

The carriage kept going, and eventually we reached a sizable mansion, which seemed to be our destination. We went through the gate, our carriage train coming to a stop in the garden within the center of the C-shape formed by the mansion. Within moments we were surrounded by soldiers in full armor (which left only their tails, wings, and furry hands in view). Apparently this was the welcoming party. To the surprise of no one, Aidy and Core 6, the Great Demon King, were right there.

It only made sense that the leaders of the country would come to welcome an envoy containing the leader of another country, but personally speaking, it was pretty funny to meet the Great Demon King right after arriving at the Demon Realm. It was like leaving the starting village and immediately getting the last boss in a random encounter.

“We meet again at last, Rokuko. I’ve been waiting for you,” Aidy said.

“Aidy! Uh-huh, I came here as soon as I could,” Rokuko replied. They then smiled and hugged. That was fine with me, but it was a little problematic that they ignored formal greetings and immediately engaged in a flagrant friendship hug. The delegates with us were glaring daggers at them.

“Hmph. I shall allow your dogs to study our culture here,” Core 6 said.

“Tch. Just don’t try to keep them here forever,” Haku replied. The actual heads of the country ignored Rokuko and Aidy’s greeting and just exchanged handshakes while grimacing and clicking their tongues in disgust.

Look, you two gotta hide your feelings a bit better too. It’s just disgraceful... Or, well, I guess it’s fine, since nobody is going to criticize the head of their countries.

It was then that Core 6 ended the handshake and looked at the delegate party.

“Now then. Welcome to my country, servants of the Laverio Empire. Study the Demon Realm’s way of life well,” Core 6 said with his head held high and his eyes looking down at them. Given that he was the Great Demon King, he held just as much power and authority as Haku. It only made sense that he would view himself as superior to Haku’s servants. The delegates bowed their heads respectfully and followed their guides inside the mansion.

...Which leaves us, the dungeon crew, all alone. What now?

“Rokuko. There’s something I would like to give you,” Aidy said.

“Huh?” I said, looking over to see Aidy holding out a hand for a handshake. Rokuko just instinctively reached out and clasped her hand. It looked a lot like a DP exchange. I heard a spark like electricity, then Rokuko twitched.

“Wh-What was that? It didn’t feel like DP,” Rokuko stammered.

“I just exchanged a copy of the communication function, as well as our access codes. Now we can contact each other whenever we want, wherever we want.”

“Oh, the communication function? Right, right. That was what you asked Father for at the last Dungeon Battle, right? Neat, neat. Can I just open it from the menu?”

“Certainly. It should already be there.”

Rokuko opened up her menu. I looked at my own menu and saw that it had a new message function. *Neat that mine gets it too. Or, rather, it is a dungeon function in the first place, so, uh, yeah.*

“He said it isn’t an official implementation yet, so I have to meet people in person and copy it to give it to them,” Aidy said.

“Hm, that’s kinda annoying.”

“Apparently he will be distributing it to everyone once he is finished, but that would be by the next Core gathering at the very earliest. I must say, it feels special that only my version of it allows me to copy it.”

So it’s like an open beta kind of thing. With copy protection, too. Kind of.

“But why the access code? Shouldn’t our Core number be enough?” Rokuko asked.

“You could imagine someone contacting a Core without permission just by knowing their number. He is considering giving different addresses to each monster with menu access... Or something of the sort. I confess that his explanation was a bit difficult to follow,” Aidy said before showing us her menu. On it was a screen resembling an email inbox. The only message inside was one from Father, describing potential future features like a block function and emoji. *It’s pretty much like email.*

“Neat,” Rokuko said.

“Incidentally, he mentioned that he would like to discuss this function with your Master, so I imagine you will be getting a message from him soon. Perhaps it’s already there.”

“Oooh... Wow, that’s incredible. I wonder how it works?”

“I have no idea. It seems that each message costs 50 DP, however.”

“Oh, it costs DP. That’s sixty entire melon rolls. Or ten high-class rolls... That’s expensive. Though I guess it’s cheap compared to sending letters?”

“It ignores distance, arrives instantly, and cannot be interrupted—more than worth the price, if you ask me. It seems he’s also thinking about allowing DP to be sent over it as well.”

...Is there any point in sending DP over messages? I guess it’s nice if you want to ask other Cores to do stuff for you? Y’know, now that I think about it, I feel like a whole culture of using DP to give tasks to other Cores all over the place is gonna develop now. Maybe I’m just imagining it.

“Incidentally, I vowed to give you the program first, so I have given it to neither Haku nor Grandfather yet,” Aidy said proudly, at which point the Grandfather in question tapped her shoulder.

“And now it is done, Aidy. You will be giving it to me next, correct?”

“Indeed. At the moment you will only be able to contact Rokuko and I, but... I shall give it to Haku as well, which may be more useful. Here you are, Grandfather.” Aidy gave Core 6 a handshake, which was clearly something they had done many times before. He gave an impressed murmur, then let go of Aidy’s hand.

“Would you like it as well, Haku?”

“Absolutely. Rokuko, contact me the instant anything happens. I will rush over at once.”

Aidy gave Haku the message function as well. *I get the feeling she’s going to send Rokuko messages every single day. Well, it’s less a feeling and more a prophetic vision. And Haku will definitely run over the second Rokuko asks, using {Teleportation} and stuff.*

“Come with me, Rokuko. I will give you and your Master a tour of my demonic capital mansion.”

“Okay. Bye bye, Haku. See you later.”

“Promise me you’ll send messages every day, Rokuko. I look forward to hearing from you,” she said, casually asking for regularly scheduled reports. *As expected. I can already tell she’ll run over the moment Rokuko goes a day without sending a message. I’ll be sure to tell Rokuko not to skip out on her messages. Yeah.*

...That said. The three of us going elsewhere would leave Haku and the Great Demon King alone. Is that really a good idea? Like, will they be safe, politically and physically?

“Fear not, Rokuko’s Master. The two of them are quite close friends. Have you noticed that this garden doubles as an arena?”

“.....”

I glanced back and saw that Haku was pulling out a white spear while the Great Demon King was unsheathing a black sword. *Yeah, okay, this is definitely out of our league. This is going to be, uh, a meeting with the language of combat between the top dogs of both countries.*

Here in the Demon Realm, mansions had fighting arenas like empire mansions had swimming pools. Every city in the realm had a coliseum without fail. In a country where one-on-one combat was so commonplace, a dream team of Haku and the Great Demon King fighting wasn’t out of the ordinary... Okay, it actually was, but everyone else was gone, so they just kinda started anyway?

Oh shit, someone tried to watch and got blown away by the aftershock. I physically turned my head and avoided looking in their direction as I followed Aidy.

“By the way, will we be studying your culture in this city?” Rokuko asked.

“Not quite. My duchy is to the south, though it will be a bit before we go through.”

“Wow, you have a duchy? That’s, like, a really mature thing to have.”

“You have an entire town yourself, don’t you? My duchy is on the rather small side.”

Meanwhile, Rokuko and Aidy were chatting as if nothing was happening at all.

I figured that Niku, Neruneh, and I would end up just not saying anything the entire time, but Aidy turned to look at me.

“There is a sizable tournament being held here. I lost a round halfway through, but the grand finals will be held tomorrow. You wish to see them, correct?”

“Oh, right, the Hell Tournament. Am I allowed to watch that?”

“Do remember that you have Haku and Grandfather’s word here. I will take you to the VIP seating.”

I mainly just want a way to contact the finalist who wins the Divine Pajamas, but asking for that might put me in their debt. Or maybe I’ll just meet them in the VIP room?

“If only you had arrived a bit sooner, you could have seen my Master and I fighting.”

“That’s too bad. I wanted to see you being cool and stuff,” Rokuko replied.

“We can engage in some light dancing while you’re here.”

“That sounds like fun! But I’ll warn you now, I can’t fight at all.”

“That’s a shame. I always forget that the sword on your hip is just for show.”

Anyway, I think I’ll just rest in one of the mansion’s guest rooms for now... Or so I thought, but Aidy took us to a line of carriages instead. They were attached to horses with six legs. I think those are called Sleipnirs?

“Are we heading to your mansion in this?” I asked.

“Indeed. Younger Sleipnirs are ideal for pulling carriages,” Aidy replied. Apparently these were young six-legged horses... or rather, they were young Sleipnirs, which were horse-type monsters that grew an extra set of legs and got a lot bigger when they matured. They were fine for pulling wagons filled with goods between cities, but they were a bit too big to be used within the cities themselves. That was a bit weird to me, but on second thought they *were* monsters. Of course they wouldn’t function just like domesticated animals. Not that I had ever heard of Sleipnirs in this world before.

Butlers opened the doors to the carriages and we climbed in. Once everyone

was inside, the carriages went off to Aidy's mansion. *Oh man, this one's pretty bumpy... Or maybe it just feels like that since I've gotten used to Haku's now. Hers is just abnormally smooth.*

"Ohhh? Is this carriage a magic tooool?"

"Oh my. You can identify magic tools, servant of Rokuko?" Aidy asked, her head held high with a smug grin on her face.

"I caaaan. I see, it doesn't do much at a low speeeed, but once it goes faster it decreases the shakiiiiing."

"Correct. It's far superior to empire carriages," Aidy said. Apparently, it was set up so that while it shook a little at low speeds, it wouldn't shake much at all once the carriage reached top speed. She called it "fire arrow" technology or something. "The only carriage that could match this in the empire would be one made for the royal family. Which is to say, the one you rode on the way here."

"Oh, so that carriage was specially made? I figured, but I wasn't sure how," Rokuko replied.

"They are made with the most advanced technology and the rarest of materials, throwing aside cost concerns to reach peaks no other carriage can. What makes ours stand out despite that is their lower price and wider field of use. Even archdukes use them. I suppose their primary weaknesses are that their wheels break easily and the horses are a bit more difficult to raise."

The wheels used special material such that there were multiple stages to their breaking: in the first stage the shaking would just get worse, and in the second stage the carriage would fall to the ground. If the wheels broke apart during the high speed movement, the carriage would inevitably fall to the side of the road and flip over. The two-stage destruction was insurance to stop that from happening. There was also some kind of gimmick to speed over crappy roads, but it was expensive to install.

"This is incredible technologyyy! Demon Realm science certainly has advanced in a different direction from the empiiire's!" Neruneh explained. Here in the Demon Realm, they overcame their unkempt roads with incredible carriages and strong horses. It was like prioritizing the power of the carriage above all else, which was very in line with their culture. In a way, really, it encapsulated

everything they were about.

“Hmm. I see you have brought a wise and knowledgeable servant with you, Rokuko.”

“Uh-huh. Neruneh is in charge of making magic tools in our dungeon, and we brought her to learn how Demon Realm magic tools work. We’re here to learn about your culture, after all.”

“That is perfectly fine. Learn well, servant of Rokuko.”

“Thank you very muuuch!” Neruneh exclaimed, happy to have received Aidy’s encouragement.

“The truth is, Grandfather is paying for your visitation here, since I cannot yet move that much money myself. The Sleipnirs are such big eaters they are quite expensive to maintain. Though in return they can run at full speed for over half a day.”

“Well, that’s fine. We rode Haku’s carriage to get here, after all. We’re all in the same boat here,” Rokuko said, smiling smugly for some reason. Aidy was giving an invincible grin of her own.

...They’re crossing channels in a weird way. Well, I’m just glad they’re on good terms with each other. I’d rather not see them duke it out like Haku and the Great Demon King.

The carriage rode through the demonic capital for a bit, then arrived at Aidy’s mansion. We got out of the carriage and saw that the building was made of stone. It was sturdily built, no doubt to be a fortress in the event of an invasion. We left our minimal luggage with the servants, then followed Aidy inside.

“I suppose an early dinner should be in order. Or would you rather rest first? I imagine you would certainly like to sleep as soon as possible, Rokuko’s Master.”

“Yeah, I’m tired enough that I’d like to eat right away and then head to bed. It’s still pretty early, but I can do dinner.”

“Geez, Keima, don’t think I forgot that you were sleeping the entire trip... Though, to be fair, Niku looks sleepy too,” Rokuko said.

Traveling takes a lot of stamina, y’know, even when you’re napping. God, I’m

sleepy.

“Then I shall order it served at once. The same food will be available in my city, but I shall treat you to Demon Realm staples. Everything should already be prepared, and will only take a few minutes to be served.”

“I can’t wait to try Demon Realm food. Too bad that Ichika is missing this,” Rokuko said.

“Actualllly, Ichika asked me to bring back Demon Realm recipes as a souveniir.”

“Oh my. I can only do so much since she isn’t here, but I can teach you all the recipes you wish to know.”

“Thank you very much, Aidyyy!” Neruneh exclaimed with a smile.

But hold on a second. We’re talking about food staples of the bloodthirsty Demon Realm here. I feel like they’re gonna serve, like, dried meat and hard biscuits or some other kind of long-lasting war rations...

* * *

...Or so I thought, but my expectations were betrayed in a good way.

“This is kneaded dough cut into thin strips, then cooked in broth prepared with dried mushrooms and the like,” Aidy explained.

“Pretty sure this is the same thing as udon,” I observed.

“Add as many chopped onions to it as you like.”

“Pretty sure this is the same thing as udon,” I observed again.

Indeed, it was udon. I asked what it was called, and she said as such.

“Onions, hm...? Not bad,” I said after taking a bite.

“Oh wow, this is pretty good. Sluuuurp,” Rokuko said with a slurp.

Whoa, Niku, don’t put too many onions on it. You’ll get sick. Because you’re a dog girl. Yes. Also, Rokuko sure is slurping up a lot of noodles.

“It’s so similar to pasta, but it’s in soup instead of covered in sauce. Neat,” Rokuko said.

“Ahahaha. It tastes just as good if you put thick sauce on top just like you would with pasta.”

There are some packaged noodles you eat like that, yeah.

“...So, Aidy. How’d this recipe come to be?”

“Mixing water with wheat results in a substance perfect for kneading, no?”

“That’s true for bread too.”

“Of course, we have bread as well. It’s just good sword practice to cut them into slices.”

“Spaghetti noodles are thinner and would be better for practice.”

“We have soumen as well.”

“You have soumen too...?” The difference between udon and soumen was how thick their noodles were, but I feel like in Japan we hand-pulled the noodles... but anyway. Udon, huh? I wonder if they have soy sauce and stuff in the Demon Realm. I’ve already been told there’s no rice in the Demon Realm, but I heard about fish sauce being in Pavella, so it would make sense for there to be soy sauce here.

“Oh, yes. Udon is a recipe spread by Ishidaka the God of Food.”

Thus all the mysteries were solved. *Ishidaka the Hero went all the way to the Demon Realm, huh? Nice networking.*

“Now that I think about it, Keima’s served food like this before,” Rokuko said thoughtfully.

“Oh? This food was in the world you’re from as well, Rokuko’s Master?”

“Yep. Sounds like Ishidaka was a Japanese Hero for sure.”

“Incidentally, does that mean anything significant?”

“...Nah, not really.” *All I know now is that the Demon Realm has udon and soumen. I guess it’s good to know about some Demon Realm history?*

“I think knowing the history and culture of a regiooon, is important for understanding iiiit,” Neruneh said while slurping udon. It certainly did seem like learning about the Demon Realm’s violent culture would lead to understanding

the development of their magic tool technology. Obviously, everything came back to their love of warfare. Allow me to list some examples.

They wanted to fight foes located far away, so they developed magic tools for carriages to ride into battle.

They developed magic tools for light so that they could fight in the darkness.

They developed water-producing magic tools so that they could have water to drink on the battlefield.

They developed magic tools related to poison and charms to kill enemies and protect themselves from similar attacks.

In short, they were all developed because they were useful in warfare, practical in warfare, and paths to succeeding in warfare. They made such a difference that their development was literally a matter of life or death. Their mages threw their all at developing them. The only problem with it all was that at times they considered the death of the user acceptable, or even good if it happened at the end of a battle.

The result was blacksmiths and alchemists competing among themselves, joining hands at times, and striving to create useful tools for warfare. Such was the history and culture of the Demon Realm.

Now that I think about it, high-speed carriages that can travel on poor roads are basically chariots... Of course the Demon Realm would make them. Should be easier to shoot arrows and spells without much shaking, too. War is always the mother of invention, no matter where you go.

Yeah, that was what I thought about while eating the udon. Good use of brain power.

* * *

After eating udon, a staple of Demon Realm cuisine, we were guided to our rooms. They were made of stone, but had carpets spread across the ground. *Oh, nice, and they've got real-deal beds. Two per room. Let's see how they feel... Ah, it's hard. Yet another board with blankets and a sheet spread over it.*

"Guess the bedding's not too advanced here... I should spread a futon on top

of the board, I guess.”

“Oh? You intend to bring your bedding to the battlefield, Rokuko’s Master?” Aidy asked. Apparently the Demon Realm believed in being wary at all times, which meant sleeping in the same conditions on both the battlefield and at home. If you could rest on hard beds in peace, you could rest on hard beds at war. That’s the Demon Realm for you.

“Keima always prioritizes bedding over food and equipment,” Rokuko chimed in.

“Strange tastes, hm? Bedding hardly ever makes a difference in the end... Perhaps he just needs to train more?”

“Actually, Aidy, soft bedding really does help you recover faster,” Rokuko said, which made Aidy fall into thought. Apparently framing in the context of recovering from wounds and battles exhausted was more likely to convince Aidy than just saying it felt better.

“Soft bedding, then. I suppose I will need to provide some to be a proper host. Though the only soft bedding in the Demon Realm are meat blankets.”

“Meat blankets? Oh, are those like our Niku?”

...Look. We all know ‘niku’ means meat slave, and we all know those meat blankets are exactly like Niku. I think I’m just gonna firmly decline here. Rokuko would kill me if I tried using a meat blanket like that.

“Oh no, it is the practice of returning to Magic Blade form and sliding yourself into a prisoner or prey to sleep. There are many weapon-type Cores in the Demon Realm.”

They aren’t exactly like Niku?! Holy shit, that’s gory!

“Interesting. I guess that’s not an option for me, then.”

“Oh, you don’t have to be a weapon-type. You can just slice their stomach open and make a hole large enough to nestle into. You can string their arms and feet up to create a floating bed in the air; using their intestines as ropes will save you some time.”

What kind of violent hammock is that?! Rokuko’s not even blinking, but holy

shit this is seriously gory! Actually, why are Neruneh and Niku listening so calmly?! What?! Am I the weird one here? Is everyone a serial killer in this world?!

“One of the books in the church said that people in cold regions kept warm by entering the bellies of the prey they hunted,” Niku explained.

“I wouldn’t be the one dying myseeeelf, sooo. I think Rei would love to be covered in blood like thaaaat.”

Hunters (Niku) and monsters (Neruneh) have minds of steel...!

“I can make arrangements for them, if you wish. A human female slave with a bit of Giant blood will do just fine, since monsters have a beastly smell to them. I’ll need to select a slave lively enough to survive until morning and maintain their warmth.”

“Mmm, thanks, but I think I’ll pass tonight,” Rokuko replied.

“Not sure I’m a fan either,” I said, echoing her declining to make it easier. *No chance in hell I’m sleeping on one of those. Also, talk about some crappy efficiency—having to kill one person per night is just a poor return on investment, on top of being too gory to actually sleep on.*

“You know you don’t need to hold back, right? We were going to kill the slaves for DP soon either way.”

“It’ll stink and get my clothes dirty, so no.”

“Really? I’m quite fond of it myself... I suppose this is what it means to have different tastes.”

I think the scale of the problem is a bit bigger than that. This really makes me feel the difference between human and Dungeon Core mindsets. Oh, and yeah, all of us will be using normal beds. Niku and Neruneh don’t need meat blankets either. Neruneh, stop looking disappointed.

“Mmm, in that case... I might not have any bedding that will satisfy you at all. There is no time to prepare anything new, after. Oh dear,” Aidy murmured with a hand on her cheek.

“It’s fine. After all, Keima always keeps his futon on him,” Rokuko replied.

“Oh, truly?”

Yup. I always keep my futon in {Storage} for times exactly like this. Rokuko does too. The nice thing about magic is that it takes the classic idea of only being able to sleep on your favorite pillow, and just allows you to take your favorite bed anyway. I don't have one for Niku and Neruneh, though.

“Assuming that Niku sleeps with Masteeer, I suppose I won't have a futoon?”

“You have DP, don't you? Buy one yourself,” Rokuko replied.

“Ngggh...!” Neruneh groaned. I didn't fully understand the hesitation, since we did pay her DP as wages. We also paid her research funds for her magic tools. *Oh, wait, is she so dedicated to her research she's struggling to decide between saving DP for it or sleeping better? I wouldn't have to think about that for a second... But, well, I wouldn't mind paying for Neruneh to have one.*

But before I could say anything, Aidy struck first. “Rokuko, would you allow me to buy one of those futons for her? She need only use that.”

“Oh, you wouldn't mind?”

“Not in the least. I am an excellent host. It is my duty to cater to the needs of my guests, and this is an expense that by all means I should be paying. If it is reusable, I can treat future guests to it as well.”

“Aaah! Aidyyy! Thank you so muuuch!” Neruneh exclaimed, overjoyed by Aidy's suggestion. It was sound logic, and it would be good marketing for the futons, so I decided to allow it.

“...Will the puppy need one as well?” Aidy asked.

“Oh, definitely not. The three of us will be sleeping together,” Rokuko replied while locking her arm around mine and leaning against me. *Wait, the three of us?*

“Hold it, Rokuko. Won't we be in separate rooms?”

“Hm? Why would we be? We're both visitors, so we'll be given the same room. Neruneh will be given a servant's room. Right, Aidy?”

What... the...? I glanced at Aidy, who smiled.

“Oh yes, Rokuko, you have my full support. I will even swear that whatever happens behind closed doors will forever remain a secret between the four of us.”

“...Aaah! Now that I think about it, Niku’s a servant toooo, isn’t sheee? That means she should sleep in the same room as meee,” Neruneh said out of nowhere. She then turned to Niku and gave very blatant winks that literally everyone could see.

“...Ah! That’s right. My dakimakura services are unnecessary with Rokuko here.”

“I suppose I’ll leave Niku with Neruneh then,” Rokuko said. By the time I recovered from my sheer disbelief of them thinking I didn’t realize they were colluding, Niku had stepped over to stand beside Neruneh.

“Huh? Wait, Neruneh. If you take Niku away, I’ll end up alone with Rokuko.”

“I will go ahead and push the beds together,” Aidy said, kicking one of the beds so that it slid over and stuck to the other bed.

Wait a second. I feel like all of my moats have been filled in, leaving me completely defenseless.

“Thanks, Aidy, the extra room means a lot. Oh, don’t worry about comforters. I brought my own.”

“Wait!”

And so, Neruneh left with Niku, telling us to enjoy our night together. It might have been my imagination, but I felt laughter in her eyes, as if she was saying “Let’s see if you really are an indecisive virgiiiiin. Ahahahahaaaa.”

* * *

And so, I ended up sleeping in bed with Rokuko. I fell asleep fast without laying a single hand on her, of course, but she seemed pretty pleased in the morning.

“Eheheh.”

Just to be clear here, I fell asleep on the spot, and all Rokuko did was sleep beside me. I wasn’t naked when I woke up, and Rokuko hadn’t slid next to me

to press herself against me. *After all, we're all tired from traveling here. I was sore all over. Of course I fell asleep on the spot. I slept so soundly I didn't even dream. The only weird thing was waking up to see Rokuko staring at my face and grinning.*

Anyway, we had udon again for breakfast. I took the opportunity to set things straight with Aidy and Neruneh, the latter of whom was grinning.

"We didn't do anything."

"Ahahaaaa. Is that sooo?"

"Of course, of course. I would never claim otherwise."

I seriously didn't do anything. As proof, my exhausted body is once again full of energy. Almost feels like I slept beneath the Divine Comforter itself. My skin's smooth and I'm feeling great. Time to head right back to sleep!

"....."

Don't tell me this is going to last for the whole trip. Hopefully Aidy will give me a different room in her duchy's mansion... Men have limits, y'know, even me.

"...And yeah, I want to use Niku. I think I'll just go back to sleep and stock up on rest."

"That's fine. Niku's a slave and doesn't count, so it'll still be just us two alone together," Rokuko said, using the logic Neruneh had described yesterday. *Gah! How does she learn so fast?!*

"Rokuko's Master. Were you not going to view the Hell Tournament's grand final today?"

"Oh. Right, guess I don't have the time to go back to sleep," I replied. Aidy reminded me of why I had come to the Demon Realm in the first place. *Get a grip, me. Don't forget that I'm here to get the Divine Pajamas.*

"By the way, Aidy. You and your Master fought in the Hell Tournament, right?" Rokuko asked.

"Yes. Unfortunately, we lost to Core 50, one of the two grand final participants we will be watching. We couldn't even win when attacking him two-on-one. He landed a blow on us."

The grand finals would be fought between Core 50 and Core 42. Both were favored to win by many and had dominated their march toward the top. Despite it being possible for Cores to participate alongside their Dungeon Masters as a pair, the Hell Tournament was a collection of the most monstrous warriors in the world. Naturally, some of those warriors were strong enough to beat even Aidy.

“Um, was your Master okay?” Rokuko asked.

“Oh my. You met my Master yesterday. In fact, he’s right here,” Aidy said before pointing to the butler behind her. “Hm? Did I not introduce you?”

It was the younger guy that had driven our carriage. He had dark red, almost black hair—the color of dried blood that had darkened with time—and he was looking at us with a blank expression, not even attempting to smile. On closer inspection, he seemed a little familiar.

“But why is he dressed like a butler...?”

“Because he is my slave, of course. He is to me as your puppy is to you.”

Now that she mentioned it, he certainly did have a collar on. Apparently a slave that had been raised in a human farm ended up as her Dungeon Master. His training had been completed and now he was a slave that obeyed any order.

...That must have been some training. Otherwise he wouldn't have used the Absolute Authority to make Aidy not need to breathe, and they would have no way to stop him from getting revenge by using Absolute Authority to assume dominance.

“Master, I will be inviting Rokuko and her Dungeon Master to the VIP seating to today’s dance party. Please make the necessary arrangements.”

“As you wish, milady,” the butler replied with a swift bow.



...The last time I had seen him, I was fighting Aidy in my third Dungeon Battle. I got the feeling he had more of a fiery, uncontrolled personality at the time.

“Er, so, what’s your name?” I asked, not wanting to keep calling him ‘Aidy’s Master.’

“...Who can say. I was born in a random village and given a random number, not a name. The closest thing to a name I have is Human Farm 5 Number 52.”

That’s pretty much an ID number, isn’t it? Dang. The Demon Realm is hardcore.

“That’s kinda hard to say, and I feel like that’ll overlap with Dungeon Cores,” I replied.

“Seems like we human farm slaves are fucking lucky enough to sometimes get the shitastic honor of sharing a name with one of our Dungeon Core masters.”

Dang, this butler has a nasty mouth. Is that his real personality slipping through? I dunno if that training’s finished after all.

“Still, I get it being hard for a guest from another world to pronounce... Alright. I’m a butler, so call me Sebas or whatever.”

“Wait, did I mention I was from another world?”

“Milady told me. Also, you were fucking wearing clothes from your world the last time I saw you.”

Oh yeah, I was wearing a jersey the first time we saw each other. I thought he just telepathically understood I was from Earth, but I guess not. Also, apparently Sebastian is a name for butlers here too.

“Perfect. Master, I shall grant you the name Sebas,” Aidy said.

“As you wish, Milady.”

Apparently they had been doing just fine with him not having a name. If you asked me if I thought Aidy would actually call him Sebas a single time, the answer would be no. She only ever called me ‘Rokuko’s Master,’ after all. *All I can say is, I’m glad I don’t have to call him some roundabout thing like Number 52 of 5 or Aidy’s Master every time.*

“...By the way, Sebas, is it just me or are you rapidly swapping between being polite and rude?”

“That would be the training, or should I say, the fucking mind-bending torture. It has been a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Sir Keima.”

You know, I think I’m pretty glad I didn’t get summoned to the Demon Realm. Yeah.

* * *

As we got closer to the coliseum, the air got hotter. Apparently so many people were visiting that their heat was literally raising the temperature. I had thought we would go all the way to the coliseum by carriage, but the path was blocked along the way and we started walking about halfway there because Aidy said it would be faster. That was when it happened.

“What?! Keima?! Is that you, Keima?!” came a voice.

“Hm?” I said, turning around, and there was a Hero I distinctly remembered—Wataru. He had a hat on, which was probably intended to be a disguise, but it really wasn’t working.

“What brings you all the way here with Rokuko and the others? I mean, this is the Demon Realm, you know,” Wataru said.

“Sorry, I think you have the wrong person.”

“Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah. I know it’s you,” Wataru said, lifting up his hat to show me his face.

I mean, okay, I knew I couldn’t hide from him. I’m here with Rokuko, Niku, and Neruneh. Of course I couldn’t pretend to be someone else. But still, I’m impressed he found us in this huge crowd... Oh, right. He has {Ultra Good Fortune}.

“Yeah, I’m just kidding. ’Sup, Wataru. What brings you here?”

“What do you think? I came here at Haku’s request to participate in the Hell Tournament. I got through the qualifier rounds and preserved the empire’s honor, though I didn’t manage to win the main tournament itself.”

“Ahhh...” I said. The group Haku had sent on ahead included Wataru.

“By the way, try not to say my name too much if you can help it. I’ve fought in wars with this country before, so... People don’t really recognize me if I wear a hat since humans mostly look the same to them, but still,” he said with a sad look in his eyes.

“Er, right,” I replied. It had slipped my mind that the Demon Realm and the Laverio Empire were at war with each other, but now that he mentioned it he probably felt pretty uneasy about being here.

“Oh, so you’re friends with Wataru, Rokuko? Fascinating,” Aidy said with a happy... or rather, a bloodthirsty look on her face as she butted into the conversation.

“Oh? You’re... one of the people who fought in the main tournament, I see.”

“My name is Aidy. I was looking forward to crossing blades with a Hero, but I unfortunately lost a round too soon,” Aidy said while gathering her skirt up slightly in a curtsy. It turned out that while all Wataru had said was that he didn’t manage to win, he had actually won quite a few rounds before losing to the same person Aidy did, Core 50. In fact, he had won in the round right after Aidy and her Master lost. “If I had only won against Lord 50, we could have had a duel.”

“Don’t sweat it, Lord 50 was crazy strong... Oh, and Keima. That is his actual name, and believe it or not, he’s a noble. Though nobles here are just called demons—monsters and demons are easy to mix up, but they’re pretty different. A ton of demons here have numbers as names. The Demon Realm sure has some strange culture.”

“Guess it just goes to show how much they prioritize practicality over everything. The names might sound strange to an imperial, but that’s just how it works here. There’s not much more depth to it than that,” I said.

“Whoa, Keima! You sure are open-minded!”

Nah, I just know the truth. Plus, humans from human farms like Sebas having names like ‘Number 52 of 5’ might be camouflage for the Cores to just say their names outright.

“I would like to have a dance with you, Wataru. Are you free at the moment?”

Aidy asked.

“Sorry, today’s my day off. I feel like I’d miss the grand finals if we fought right now.”

“I suppose I’m interested enough in the grand finals to agree. We can do it some other time, then.”

“Yep, if the opportunity arises,” Wataru said. Aidy held out a hand, and he gave her a firm handshake.

“Oh, want something to eat, Keima? I got some Demon Realm snacks at a stand earlier,” Wataru said, handing out a cup to me. Inside was an orange-colored paste of some kind. *Why the hell is it such a bright orange? It’s kind of grainy too, and sticky. I can feel the heat through the cup. Seriously, what is this?*

“...Er, what? Is this food? Does it taste good?”

“It’s super sweet and good. Oh, Neruneh, you have some too,” Wataru said.

It was impossible to judge how it would taste from appearance alone. *As for the smell... Uh? It’s kind of sweet, but it’s hard to say...*

“Ooooh. Is that ground carrots mixed with wheat that’s been boileed?” Neruneh asked.

“Wow! You sure know a lot, Neruneh!”

“It was one of the recipes they gave meee,” Neruneh replied.

...Oh. Now that she mentions it, carrots are orange too. And it smells like carrot cake. Hm. Man, my impression of food sure changes a lot when I know what it’s made of. Guess you can’t be too careful when it comes to fantasy world food.

“Wow, it’s all sticky,” Rokuko said.

“It’s known as halva. I believe it was one recipe introduced by Ishidaka,” Aidy replied as both she and Rokuko took cups of halva from Wataru as well.

...Wait, this is from a Hero? People ate this on Earth? Wow.

“Carrots... Ngh. I will leave this for Ichika,” Niku said, putting her cup into

{Storage} without taking a bite.

You've gotta learn to eat your vegetables, Niku. You don't seem too happy about the fact you're not getting any taller, but a lack of nutrients is probably to blame for that.

"So, just sticking around now that you've lost your match, Wataru?" I asked.

"Yep. I'm just here for tourism now. What brings *you* here, though, Keima?"

"We're here on a cultural exchange. At Haku's request, of course."

"A cultural exchange, huh? I thought for sure you were here on a honeymoon," Wataru said, glancing at Rokuko. Rokuko gave him a meaningful smile and nod.

Uh, no. Don't even say that. Haku's still in this city and she'll come for my head.

"Oh, if you're here to learn about the culture, that explains why Neruneh's with you instead of Ichika," Wataru observed.

"Pretty much. The Demon Realm has some pretty advanced magic tool technology, after all."

"I guess I wasted my money buying all these magic tool textbooks I was going to give to her..."

"I'll take them nooow," Neruneh said with a smile as she held out her hands. Wataru instantly handed the books right to her.

"Yaaay! Thank you, Wataruuu."

"Any time. Say, Neruneh, would you mind going on a date with me after all this? We can watch the grand finals in the participants gallery together."

"Neruneh's working as our servant right now. If you really want to spend some time with her, I'm gonna charge you five golds per hour."

"Oof, that's expensive. Well, I don't want to get in the way of her work anyway," Wataru said as he gave up without much fuss.

"By the way, we already have plans to watch the grand finals in the VIP seats."

"Oh, really? The VIP seats? Consider me jealous... or on second thought, I

guess I'm not jealous at all."

Wataru's statement there kind of threw me off, but we had somewhere to be so I shoved it into the corner of my mind and walked to the coliseum with Wataru. As soon as we got there we parted ways. It seemed that the VIP seats Aidy reserved for us were in an entirely different location from the participant seats.

And so, it took approximately no time at all to realize why Wataru had said he wasn't jealous.

* * *

The coliseum was packed, and everyone—including those watching while standing without seats—were enthused with fervor. It was about what you would expect from the grand finals of the Hell Tournament. And yet, despite all the heated passion, there was one place where one would feel a chill that felt close to absolute zero.

That place being the VIP seating where we were. It was in a box located so close to the arena the blood might splatter onto our faces, and the view was good enough that there was no doubting the seats were the best in house. The problem was the people there.

"Tch."

"Hmph."

Indeed. It was Haku and the Great Demon King. In a sense the VIP seating was the most heated in the coliseum, while simultaneously being chilly enough to feel like it was the middle of winter.

Who the hell gave these two seats in the same box? Father did the same thing earlier, but that was only fine because it was him hosting, alright?

"Sister, isn't this exciting?!"

"Grandfather, who do you expect to win, I wonder?"

Sitting there completely unfazed between them were Rokuko and Aidy, and I was stuck sitting beside Rokuko. Do you understand what that means? Rokuko and Aidy were sitting between Haku and Core 6, and I was sitting between

Rokuko and Aidy. Indeed. By some twist of fate, I was sitting in the middle seat of the whole box. Was this an attempt to assassinate me through stress?

Niku, Neruneh, and Sebas were standing behind our seats as servants. That's where I wanted to be. But before I could slide back there, both Haku and Core 6 had directed me to sit with them. How could I refuse either of them?!

"Rokuko, I am hoping that Lord 50 wins, since he was the one to defeat me," Aidy said.

"Oh, I think I'll cheer for him, then."

"My my, Rokuko, how sweet. Ahaha."

The two of them were like a spring breeze flowing through an icebox. It was so surreal I almost wanted to question whether they truly were invincible.

"H-Hey, Aidy. Mind if I ask why these two are in the box?"

"Haku is a country leader, you know. Is it not obvious that she would sit with Grandfather, a leader of equal status?"

"That's right, Keima. Use some common sense here. Why wouldn't the leader of a country host another leader?"

Common sense tells me that if you put two rabid dogs like them in the same room they might end up starting a war. Gah, this sucks. They're both radiating a murderous aura so intense I can't stop sweating. I'm kind of curious about who won their duel yesterday, but now doesn't seem like a great time to ask.

In any case, the grand finals began before long.

Three people stepped into the arena. First was Core 50, a black knight in full plate armor. His opponents were Core 42 and their Master, neither of which were humans. The Master was a triple-headed Cerberus, and Core 42 was a reaper with a scythe. Both teams were more than favored to win, and their arrival at the grand finals surprised nobody.

The battle itself was intense as could be. Core 50 slammed his sword into the ground to send a wave of broken earth toward Core 42, whose Master leapt into the air and roared with each of its three heads, each spitting out fire, water, and electricity respectively into a maelstrom of destruction. Every time I

thought one of them landed a blow it was actually an afterimage, and at some point Core 50 just flat-out split into two, which led to Core 42 lifting up their scythe and bringing down a rain of icy blades. The once-flat field of the arena ended up a broken mess covered in obstacles in the blink of an eye, which led to a high-level battle in which anything went as they both exploited the obstacles to add dimensions to their attacks.

...All that said, I was so focused on the intense pressure of the two people around me that I could hardly focus on the fight.

In the end, it was Core 50 who won. He and his clone had their swords pointed at the throats of Core 42 and their Master, respectively.

“Now that the battle is over, it is fairly clear that Core 50 was in control from beginning to end,” Aidy observed.

“I couldn’t really tell since everything was going so fast. Was he really?” Rokuko asked.

“His victory was so assured he had the leeway to give Core 42 an opportunity to show off his strength and appear to be an equal fighter,” Aidy explained. I didn’t actually understand how she came to that conclusion, but I did understand that Core 50 was overwhelmingly stronger than Core 42.

Suddenly, Core 6 stood up and leaned out of the box. “I shall prepare the field. Move,” he said, and the three fighters retreated to the coliseum’s entrance.

“{Grand Pike}, {Grand Hammer},” he said before swinging his pitch-black greatsword down. That was all he did. But the single swing was enough for giant spikes to shoot out of the ground, then be crushed flat by an enormous, invisible hammer.

He had launched two area of effect attacks that covered the arena’s entire field. The fact he didn’t chant told me that they were sword skills rather than spells. The result was a flat field in the arena, as if a roller had smoothed it all out.

“So this is the Great Demon King’s power... He can flatten the arena as many times as he wants!” Rokuko explained. While that was a weird way to put it, she

wasn't wrong.

"Splendid. Your power never fails to impress, Grandfather," Aidy said, a student attempting to learn from the skills of her master.

"As skilled at precise control as always, I see. It brings me endless amusement that you are so delicate and sensitive in these matters despite your brutish appearance," Haku said spitefully.

"I am equally amused by the fact you are so clumsy and careless that you could never perform such a feat, but mocking your jealousy can wait," Core 6 said before grabbing the back of my neck and lifting me into the air like a cat.

Uh? What?

"We shall now begin a special exhibition match. Lord 50, this is your opponent," he continued.

"Huh?! Wait, what?! I didn't hear anything about thi—gah!" I choked as I was thrown straight onto the field, earning a stir from the crowd as I failed to catch myself and instead rolled across the ground. Who could blame them? I could understand them wanting to know who the hell I was and why I was coming out of nowhere. *Well, this is still better than the icy murderous hell that was the VIP box.*

I glanced back at the box seating where I was a second ago. Inside was Core 6 looking down at me calmly, Haku smiling in amusement, Rokuko giving me a thumbs up to cheer me on, and Aidy grinning. *Oh no... I have no allies.*

The sound of clanking metal footsteps came this way. I turned and saw Core 50, the black knight approaching. "You are my opponent? I admit to having been curious about you when I saw you in the VIP seating, but... you do not appear to be strong whatsoever," he said, slightly muffled by the helmet. It was so dark inside his armor I couldn't see his face. I could guess that rather than him being in human form and wearing armor, he probably was just flat-out a Living Armor or something like that.

"Er, heya. Congrats on the big win. I'm not actually sure what's going on here... Are you?" I asked.

"Hm... Ah, wait just a moment. It seems the king has words for us," Core 50

said, so I looked back at the box.

“Lord 50. Before you is Keima Goren, a Dragon Buster of the Laverio Empire. It seems that he desires the Divine Pajamas that you have won in this tournament. Will you accept his duel?”

“Oh? A Dragon Buster you say... Your words are unquestionable, and so I believe this in full. But my king, he appears to be naught but a normal human. I do not think he would survive the fight,” Core 50 said, and he was entirely correct. Thinking about it now, Dungeon Cores were made in lots of one hundred, which made every Core up to 99 members of the same generation. Core 50 was as old as Core 6 and Haku. I had beaten Ittetsu before, but he was Core 112—one slot younger. No way would Core 50 be weaker.

“A fair point. In that case, I forbid you from attacking him. And furthermore, if he lands a single blow, you will lose. The round will last for ten minutes.”

“Yes, my lord!”

Wait, so he can't attack me? And I win if I land a single blow? I might actually have a chance at winning, then. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

“Er, so you'll give me the Divine Pajamas if I land a blow on you?”

“Of course, as the king has ordered such. Come at me with all you have.”

“Er, well, okay. Here's to a good fight,” I said, holding out my right hand for a handshake.

“Indeed,” Core 50 replied, reaching out as well. We clasped hands, and... done.

“{Fireball}.”

“Ho there!”

I launched a fireball in a surprise attack, but Core 50 released my hand and evaded it in the blink of an eye.

“Gah!”

“Bwahaha! What an excellent fighting spirit you have! I see you truly wish to win!”

He had dodged my initial surprise attack. Core 50 told me to come at him, and I said “here’s to a good fight,” which more or less signaled the start of it. My plan was to use that logic to call my surprise attack fair, but he had predicted that entirely. *Guess it goes to show he’s not the top dog of all the battle-crazed Demon Realm warriors for nothing!*

“How about this, then... Gate, open. I summon thee, magic-wielding monster of stone. Serve me—{Summon Gargoyle}, {Summon Gargoyle}, {Summon Gargoyle}, {Summon Gargoyle}... Go!”

“Ah, ah, ah! These are small fries, but there are certainly a lot of them!” Core 50 exclaimed. Wataru was watching, but I had summoned about twenty in front of him before. I would try to attack with numbers but with a max limit of twenty Gargoyles. Cheers filled the arena. Whether they were cheering at me for summoning so many Gargoyles at once, or cheering at Core 50 for dodging twenty magic attacks at once with ease, it was impossible to say.

“Bwahahaha! Not bad, not bad at all!” Core 50 said, lightly sidestepping all the attacks so nimbly it was hard to believe he was in a full set of armor. He was so nimble it really was like he was dancing; it just went to show that his true body was the suit of armor after all.

“—{Fireball}! —{Ice Bolt}!” I chanted, throwing out curving fireballs and straight-shot ice arrows. But Core 50 easily dodged and blocked those as well, not letting a single hit land on him.

Rapid-fire attacks weren’t accomplishing anything. At this rate he would just block everything. I let the Gargoyles do their own thing and focused on my own magic. Ideally I could use an invisible area of effect attack that covered the whole field like what the Great Demon King just did. Something like that should be impossible to dodge.

“O balls of fire, form a wall! Fireball Wall!” I chanted, hashing together a fake spell by lining up a bunch of {Fireballs} in the air to create a wall made of balls of fire. I could have just not chanted at all, but I was trying to camouflage what I was doing. It was a bit imperfect compared to the Great Demon King’s {Grand Hammer}, but it might just work while he was being held down by the Gargoyles!

“A good idea, but poor execution,” Core 50 said, and in the blink of an eye he was standing right behind me. The wall of fireballs ended up exploding and taking out only the Gargoyles.

“...Strange. Weren’t you just beneath the fire wall?”

“I ran for a moment. Those small fries pose no more threat than pillars with magic traps within them. They won’t give me even a moment’s pause.”

“I see,” I replied. So this was the leeway that Aidy had spoken of. *At last, I truly see.*

“Your accomplishment here is something to be proud of. Not many could force me or all people to run for safety. Truly you are one strong enough to have defeated a dragon.”

“Er... Your praise honors me,” I said, holding out a hand again.

“...Hm. I suppose I don’t need to show you that much consideration, but I am willing to make an exception. Show me your ace in the hole,” Core 50 said, grabbing my hand.

Ngh. Grabbing my hand so hard it hurts should count as an attack, if you ask me. But anyway... Let’s go.

“O balls of fire, surround us... Fireball Dome,” I chanted, creating a dome of fireballs to surround both Core 50 and I. Our hands were locked together. Knocking me aside would count as an attack. The dome of fireballs had no openings.

“Oh? This certainly is a dangerous situation.”

“Alright, let’s see if you can escape this... Crush!” I said, bringing the dome of fireballs inwards, wrapping up both me and Core 50 in an explosion. However... only I fell.

“Bwahaha! Unfortunately for you, that was but a clone!” Core 50 roared. Apparently he had swapped places the moment he clasped my hand. On second thought, it only made sense he wouldn’t shake my hand so easily after what I did at the start. Guh.

* * *

And so, the special exhibition match ended in Core 50's victory. I had put up a fairly impressive fight against the champion, so the crowd had gotten reasonably pumped up. My suicidal attack at the end didn't work, but the strength of my resolve earned a lot of respect.

"An excellent fight. You both fought well," Core 6 announced.

"Yes, my lord! Your praise honors me beyond words!"

"Yeaaah. Thank you," I said. *Crap, I can't believe I lost with all those rules in my favor... This is awful.*

"Now, as agreed upon, I will take him as my slave," Core 50 said.

"Indeed," Core 6 nodded while I was blinking in shock.

"W-Wait just a second. When did we agree on that?!"

"Hm? Are you unaware of Demon Realm culture? Those who lose in duels become the slaves of the winner."

"But, uh, I'm an official envoy of the empire."

"What of it? You challenged him to a duel yourself, backing out of it now would be unthinkable," Core 6 said with a dismissive snort.

Er, well. I guess that's true. And I guess I did hear about losers being turned into slaves.

I glanced at the box seats and saw the Haku was smiling brightly. *AAAAH! She tricked me! She plotted this! Save me, Rokuko! Say something to Haku! Oh, I see her protesting! Yes! Do it, Rokuko!*

"Baron Goren is a valuable member of our empire. I cannot permit him to be enslaved permanently, but I will allow for him to become a temporary contract slave for the duration of this cultural exchange," Haku announced.

"That is fine with me! Bwahaha!" Core 50 laughed.

"Seriously, Haku...?" I began before trailing off. *Well, better a temporary slave than a permanent one, I guess. Yeah.*

Suddenly, I heard someone whispering in my ear. It was Haku. *Is this {Air Voice}? That's a low-rank spell that carries voices far. Anyway, she asked "Can*

you hear me?" so I'm just gonna nod.

Haku smiled. *"I heard that you slept in bed with Rokuko."*

Ohhhh shit. Er, well... I tried to stop it. I've been keeping my distance from her this whole time. We slept in the same room, but I didn't touch her once!

"Well, regardless. I shall let it be for now, Keima. If you spend time with Lord 50 as his slave, you will have that many more opportunities to acquire the Divine Pajamas, no?"

Oh. Good point. Now that she mentions it... This might actually be a good thing?

As I pondered how I could exploit this opportunity, a collar clicked as it was locked around my neck.

Side Chapter — Rei's Naming Sense

Rei was going through immense internal debate. Her Master, Keima, had entrusted her with the customization and summoning of a Fairy. With the DP he'd given her, filling her with motivation, Rei scrolled through the DP Catalog's customization menu with an intense look, at which point she found the Body Split option.

Body Split. This power would allow a single Fairy to split into multiple Fairies, much like a Slime. With each split, the Fairy would weaken, but as long as they didn't split too many times they would still listen to orders. Worst case scenario, they could reform into a single Fairy, and if she dedicated all the DP they had given her to one monster, it would end up superior to most humans.

"Hm? On second thought, that will require me to buy skills only once rather than three times for each Fairy! This is the kind of money-saving principle that Master loves so much! We will only need a single scroll per skill!"

I can't forget to give it the Magic Aptitude that Master mentioned... And then, Body Split. Ideally it will have a large body to make splitting easier... Oh no. Now it costs 50,000 DP. Is there anything I can remove... Mm, I don't think so.

There was a mysterious elasticity column, but Rei knew it was best not to touch things one didn't understand. It would be a big problem if the Fairy ended up not being of any use. After all, Rei herself was a living example of what could happen if one played it too loose with the customization bars—her zero attack power was like a curse.

"...Well, I suppose I can cover the extra 5,000 DP with some of my own savings," Rei said. All that meant was she would have to put off buying that scroll she wanted. Rei added 5,000 of her saved up DP, then summoned the Fairy.

"And there it is," Rei said aloud. Before her was a Fairy bowing her head, and although she was only the size of a human child, that was fairly large for a Fairy. She had purple hair and mysterious, iridescent eyes. From looks alone it was

clear she had an aptitude for magic.

The Fairy smiled at Rei. "Are you my Master?"

"No, I am your commander, Rei. I summoned you at the orders of our shared Master. If we may get straight to the point, please show me your body splitting."

"My commander... Understood, Rei." The Fairy bowed, then split into two right in front of Rei.

"Is this acceptable?" both of the fairies asked.

"...Your colors seem to be different," Rei observed. One had blue hair while the other had red hair. Both were a bit smaller than the original fairy.

"We also split our traits," they both replied simultaneously.

"I see. Can you split more? And only one of you needs to talk at this point."

"Understood."

And so the Fairy continued splitting. She went from two, to four, to eight, and then... to sixteen. At that point some of them were just balls of light with wings, some were wingless little people, and so on.

"This is my limit. If I split any further I might not be able to return to normal," said the representative Fairy.

"I see, very good. You may return to one," Rei said, and the Fairies started sticking to each other again. In the blink of an eye, they had returned to being just one Fairy.

"For now, you will assist in the management of the dungeon. There is one other dungeon manager at the moment; please work well with her. Lastly, I shall give you a name. It is only temporary, as Master will be performing the proper naming ceremony."

Now then, what name should I give her? Rei pondered.

"There are so many options to choose from. Hmmm..."

The first name that came to mind was Echo. After all, Rei had given her Body Split to save DP.

Alpha could also work. Rei was the leader of the monster administrators, and the team she led was of course known as the Alpha Team. Not that Master was aware of it, nor had approved that name. Ahem. Oh, but overlap between the names might cause some conflict, so Rei added Re from her own name to make it Re Alpha.

That said, she would be supporting the dungeon from the shadows, so Phantom could work too. And she was so big for a Fairy that was, in a sense, a Queen of Fairies. But she was smaller than Kinue.

Chris was a cute name, though. Rei didn't know what it meant, but she knew some humans had names like that. Though the Fairy was superior to humans, so maybe add Tia to it. Crystia... Mm, not quite.

What about combining 'fam' for 'family' with 'rade' for 'comrade' to make Famrade—but maybe that was just too cool? Ideally, she would be strong enough to kill a Troll, so maybe Troll Killer would be perfect... Though actually, a dungeon manager didn't actually need that much power. She just needed to be better than Goblins, so maybe Hob Gob, as a callback to Hobgoblins being the superior goblins? Wait, were Goblins a kind of Fairy?

Stuff like the moon and the night sky seemed to go with Fairies. There was a knife shaped like a crescent moon called a Mezzaluna. But, well... that wasn't cute.

Music, then. The Fairy could split on a dime, so maybe Quintet to reflect music with five parts? Or, well, if that was the direction to go into, maybe Cell Division would work all on its own. Rei had read about that in one of the books at the church.

But no. That was getting far less cute.

Cute things, cute things... Babies? Oh, right, there was a baby named Netero in the village. Mm, well, that was fine for a human. Oh! But maybe a demonic name would actually go here? The contrast might make her even more cute. Bazalzus, Driano... Dreano? Huh. Rei couldn't quite remember how the names went.

Oh, maybe Polka? Not that the name meant anything.

Well, one of those names *had* to be good. The Fairy herself could just pick which one she liked. It was a temporary name, after all.

Rei turned to the Fairy. “I shall now state a list of names. Pick which you like.”

“Understood.”

“Echo, Re Alpha, Phantom, Queen of Fairies, Crystia, Famrade, Troll Killer, Hob Gob, Mezzaluna, Quintet, Cell Division, Netero, Bazalzus, Driano, Dreano, and Polka.”

“I would like all of them.”

“What?”

“All of them.”

Rei was so surprised she asked for confirmation, but got the same reply.

“That would make your temporary name be Echo Re Alpha Phantom Queen of Fairies Crystia Famrade Troll Killer Hob Gob Mezzaluna Quintet Cell Division Netero Bazalzus Driano Dreano Polka, though. Are you sure you want this...?”

“Yes.”

“You... You don’t think it’s too long?” Rei asked, blinking in surprise. The newbie Fairy shook her head.

“These are all names you thought up for me, Rei. I must not waste a single one. They are all precious.”

“Echo Re Alpha (etc) Polka...! You are such a wonderful person...!”

“Thank you, Rei! From this day forth, I am Echo (etc) Polka...!”

“Echo (etc) Polka...!”

“Yes! I am Echo (etc) Polka!”

“Echo (etc)ka!”

“Yes! E(tc)ka! I will never forget this, Rei!”

The two of them high-fived. They felt like they were on top of the world, like their feelings had joined together and they had become an inseparable pair.

“Now then! Let’s practice your body splitting until it’s time to show it to

Master, E(tc)!”

“Yes, Rei! I am your humble servant, (etc)! You may count on me!”

And so (etc) practiced her Body Splitting while going out of her way to say her name alongside Rei. But ultimately, Keima said the name was too long, and they had to settle on using the beginning and end of the name to form Elka.

Chapter 2

And so the Hell Tournament's closing ceremony concluded, with me stuck as Core 50's slave. To be precise, I was a contract slave for a limited period of time. My safety was... technically guaranteed, but it was a bit fragile.

"Welcome to my service. Before we leave, you may say goodbye to your friends," Core 50 said.

"Er, right," I replied before capitalizing on his kindness to go talk to Rokuko and the others, who were still in the box seat.

"Well, that's that, Rokuko. See you when I see you."

"Why do you seem so ridiculously calm about this, Keima...?" Rokuko asked, looking a bit exasperated.

"I'm pretty much terrified on the inside, but panicking won't help anything, so I've accepted my fate."

"Really...? Grr, but I was looking forward to playing around in the Demon Realm with you," Rokuko said, pursing her lips in dissatisfaction.

Neruneh popped her head out from behind Rokuko. "Master, what should we dooo?"

"Er... Well, you should study like I brought you here to do. Also, you and Niku should listen to Rokuko's orders in my stead. Aidy, sorry about this, but I'm leaving her to you."

"Understooood," Neruneh said before backing off.

"Ahaha, you may certainly leave Rokuko to me. I will take extremely good care of her," Aidy said with a grin. I didn't think she was actually planning anything, but she kind of had a resting evil face that made me nervous about anything she said. Niku wasn't very assertive, and Neruneh would probably be too absorbed in her studies to stop anything, so... *Is there anyone I can count on to keep Rokuko safe?*

“Keima!” came a voice, and I turned to see Wataru rushing down from some nearby seats. *Oh yeah, he’s here. I guess the seats for the participants are second-closest to the arena after the box seats.*

“Heya, Wataru. What’s up?”

“What do you mean, ‘What’s up’?! I can’t believe you actually lost, Keima... Is it going to rain spears tomorrow?”

This may be the Demon Realm, but spears raining down from the sky is... maybe not that unrealistic?

“What do you think I am, Wataru? Everybody loses sometimes, myself included. Not to mention that I was dealing with the champion of the Hell Tournament himself.”

“Hm, well, good point. Even I lost to him... Anyway, that magic of yours was pretty impressive. It wasn’t an actual Fire Wall, right?”

“Yeah. Too bad it missed, though.”

“Well... All I can say is, Lord 50’s something else. That would have hit most opponents. Even I would’ve had to use the Holy Blade Air to avoid it,” Wataru said while patting the Holy Blade on his hip. “But that said, are you sure about leaving Rokuko and the others on their own? This is the Demon Realm, you know.”

In reality, I was nervous, even with them being under Aidy’s protection. The people here just casually cut others open to sleep inside them, after all. Who knows what would happen if I left her alone in this kind of culture?

...At which point, it hit me. *Wouldn’t it be good in more ways than one to have Wataru guard them?*

“Y’know, Wataru, you’re the one guy I can trust in this entire country. I sure would appreciate you guarding them.”

“That’s really kind of you to say. But sadly, I’m here on a limited visa that says I have to leave once the tournament’s over. I might be able to stay with Haku’s permission, but there’s still work in the empire I have to do,” Wataru replied. He was a Hero working pretty hard for the empire in order to pay back his debt

to me. She wouldn't give him permission to extend his vacation further that easily. I glanced her way.

"While I, too, would much appreciate him guarding Rokuko, I agreed to send him home with a certain old geezer, and I would rather not leave a Hero lying around in the Demon Realm," Haku said.

"Quite. A Hero of the Laverio Empire staying in my realm will not go unnoticed. After all, he is the dog of a certain ivory mutt. I cannot allow him to stay here further," Core 6 agreed.

...That means some political arrangements would have to be made to keep Wataru in the Demon Realm. Hm. But on second thought, that means it's possible with a little manipulation.

"...How about you become a slave too, Wataru? A slave to Rokuko and Neruneh," I suggested without really thinking about it.

"Wha?!"

"While I'm separated from Rokuko as a slave, you could become one yourself and protect Rokuko while I'm gone. Neruneh and Niku, too. You can't stay here as a Hero, but you should be able to as a slave, right? They are considered property, after all."

"...You're not just trying to get revenge and enslave me because you got enslaved yourself, right?"

Nope, I promise. Really.

"How is that, Great Demon King? Could he stay as a slave instead of as a Hero?"

"...I suppose. An empire Hero falling into slavery will provide much amusement, at the very least."

Alright. The Great Demon King himself said it'll be fine.

"But Keima, I cannot simply allow a Hero to fall into slavery for no good reason. Especially not right before my eyes. Please give me a single good reason for this," Haku said.

"If you think about it, with that debt he should've been knocked into slavery

on the spot. I mean, how many hundreds of golds was it again? Back me up here, Wataru.”

“Well, anybody but me would’ve fallen into debt slavery for sure. A normal person might spend their entire lives working and never earn one hundred golds total.”

“That said, you’d just be a contract slave here, not a debt slave. Your job will be to protect Rokuko and the others. The payment will be me absolving all of the debt you owe me. Sound good?” I asked.

“That is a quite exceptional deal,” Haku observed.

At the moment he was paying me back one hundred golds a month, since that was how about much Haku was paying him for his work. I forgot exactly how much he still owes me, but this deal would be equivalent to paying off like a year or more of hard work’s worth of debt. The best part was, it wouldn’t even hurt my wallet at all.

“Of course it’s a good deal. It’d have to be for a Hero to agree to be a slave, even temporarily. I think it’s a fair price.”

“Very well, I will hear you out. Why would you pay that much for him?”

“The reason is simple. It’s you, Haku.”

“Me?” Haku asked, pointing at herself in confusion.

“You told me to protect Rokuko’s safety no matter what. As a noble of the Laverio Empire, it is my absolute duty to do everything I can to ensure Rokuko’s safety. It only makes sense that while I’m stuck as Lord 50’s slave I would try to get her the best bodyguard possible,” I said, and at that point Haku smiled.

“I understand your point. Wataru has been accepting my quests as an adventurer with me paying grand sums for his services. If he would like to accept your quest, then as the grandmaster of the Adventurer’s Guild I shall make it happen. And if he is temporarily made a slave, I won’t have to worry about anyone laying their hands on Rokuko,” Haku said. She was acting reluctant about it, but she gave her permission with an extremely pleased smile. She was even going out of her way to establish it as a quest from the Adventurer’s Guild grandmaster. That way, we could frame this as Wataru

becoming a slave as part of a quest, just temporarily changing his status at the empire's orders to accomplish an objective. That would sound better to the public.

At any rate, Haku, you're smiling way too hard. She must have really, really hated the idea of leaving Rokuko and me in the Demon Realm. Can't say I blame her, considering she wouldn't be able to keep watch on us here.

"Is this fine with you as well, Rokuko?" she asked.

"Ngh, I guess... Keima went out of his way to get this bodyguard for me, so. I don't want to spend this trip without him, but I guess there's nothing else I can do," Rokuko said. At Haku's encouragement, she reluctantly accepted Wataru as her bodyguard. "But I want to give you one too, Keima. Can I?" she asked, looking my way. I could have asked 'Do I really seem that unreliable,' but I didn't. Reason being, I knew more than anyone how unreliable I was. I had steeled my resolve for becoming a slave, but I was actually pretty terrified.

"Oh my, how wonderful. A man and woman exchanging gifts in the form of venerable fighters out of concern for each other. Grandfather, would you be so kind as to allow me to grant Rokuko's wish?"

"A guard for a slave, hm? Very well. If you wish to provide such on your own, I shan't stop you."

And so, Rokuko's idea worked because Aidy threw in her support.

"Thanks, Core 6. And thank you, Aidy."

"Ahaha. You may express more gratitude if you'd like. But first, I wonder who we should send with him?"

Rokuko glanced Niku's way. Her tail wagged with resolve.

"Niku. Would you protect Keima for me?"

"As you wish, Rokuko," Niku replied with her tag wagging hard with joy.

...Well, this feels a lot better than me being sent to some strange place on my own. Whew. Thanks, Rokuko. And you, Niku. I've decided we'll hold a feast of melon rolls and hamburgers when we get home.

"You better come back safe, Keima," Rokuko said.

“Yeah.”

Just as Niku moved next to me, I heard loud armored footsteps approaching from behind.

“Have you finished your goodbyes? It seems that there is a new slave to bring with me,” Core 50 said.

“Er, well, yep. Hope you have room for both of us, Lord 50.”

“I will be in your care,” Niku said.

Core 50 bent down with a clatter to make eye contact with Niku.

“I see. You are small, but have fine eyes. Not bad... Very well! I shall train you both! Bwahahahaha!”

Seems like Core 50 doesn't have any problem at all with Niku tagging along. He's as big-hearted as I would expect from a first lot demon. But uh... What was that about training us both? Is Core 50 planning to train me? Just what are slaves in the Demon Realm expected to do...?

“Now then, we are off. Enter my {Storage}.”

“Uh...”

Core 50 opened the black portal to his {Storage} in front of us, then pushed both Niku and I inside. *Ahhh. Slaves are tools, so it's only natural to carry them around in {Storage}. Very practical. Yup.*

* * *

And so began my life as a slave with Niku. Though it was nothing new for her since she had always been a slave. Anyway, we both got pulled out of {Storage}. It felt as if we had been pulled out right after being pushed in, but our environment had completely changed.

“This is my duchy, and this is my mansion,” Core 50 announced. It seemed that we had been brought all the way to the mansion in his duchy.

Judging by where the sun is, several hours have passed. Or maybe days? Well, either way, this is pretty convenient. I actually didn't know that living beings could be put into {Storage} without any problems.

“To begin with, you shall show me the extent of your abilities,” Core 50 said. We were starting off by facing him. Starting to fight before even having a conversation was very much a Demon Realm thing. *Guess it’s important to establish rank among the slaves.*

“I already fought in the coliseum, so I dunno if there’s any need for me to— Ngh!” I choked out, the collar tightening enough to block off my air flow.

“Master, slaves mustn’t backtalk.”

“R-Right. Sorry, Lord 50,” I apologized. Core 50 nodded.

“Indeed. I see the small one understands her position more than you do. This time, I will answer your question. What you showed me in the coliseum was your prowess with magic, but what I wish to see here is the other abilities you possess.”

I see. I guess I didn’t show any defense or physical offense in that fight. That said...

“I feel like Niku and I would die if you hit us a single time.”

“Of course, I shall hold my power back. I am quite used to that.”

“I see...” *Well, at least we won’t die. Hopefully we won’t be crippled either.*

“First, I will engage you with my bare hands. You may use your preferred weapons and skills,” he said, and Niku immediately readied her two daggers. She was ready to go.

As for me... *Mm, I don’t think Siesta is a very combat-oriented weapon.* The sleep particles it radiates are good for humans and living foes, but a Living Armor core like Core 50 won’t be affected at all. Not to mention that I’m a back row mage.

Thus, I decided to just stand behind Niku.

“Hm. Is the Magic Blade on your hip ornamental?”

“Yeah, pretty much. I am a mage,” I replied, ready to shoot out magic whenever it was necessary. *Maybe I would look cooler with a staff or something?*

“Then you may begin,” he said. Niku instantly leapt forward.

“Hoh! Hoh! Not bad at all! You show no fear even when facing one such as I, girl!”

“Who wouldn’t fight when someone tells them to?”

“You are quite the specimen for an empire slave! You are on par with a thoroughbred Demon Realm combat slave!” Core 50 said joyously while knocking aside Niku’s blows with his armored hands and arms. It felt a little cheap for him to use gauntlets despite saying bare hands earlier, but whatever. I didn’t want the collar to choke me for making quips like that. If he actually was a Living Armor-type Core then his gauntlets were his bare hands; maybe in the Demon Realm bare hands included gauntlets.

“Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt},” I chanted, doing my job too. I was casting magic attacks while predicting Niku’s movement from her tail wagging to avoid hitting her. All I could do was give her support.

“Bwahaha! Not bad, you two. Time to turn things up a notch,” Core 50 declared, so pleased by our attacks that he sped up his movements.

“Ngh, ah!” Niku gasped as the sound of clanging metal filled the air. Up until now Core 50 had been blocking her attacks, but now Niku was stuck blocking his fists with her blades.

...Guess I’ll need to give more magic backup.

“Gate, open. I summon thee, magic-wielding monster of stone. Serve me—{Summon Gargoyle}.”

I decided to surround him with summoned Gargoyles. It was a spell I had shown him a second ago (from my perspective), so revealing this card posed no problem for me. Once he was surrounded I had them attack him with fireballs. Naturally, it would be hard to make sure none of them were aimed in Niku’s direction, but that had a relatively simple solution if you looked at it from another angle.

“Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt}.”

“Ngh! Ah, I see! You are blocking them yourself!”

Indeed. All I had to do was shoot magic and diffuse the fireballs before they hit her. That would also create openings in Core 50's defense that Niku could exploit with attacks. It was a strategy that balanced offense with defense. The only problem was that we couldn't land a finishing blow.

"I am going up another level!" Core 50 roared, speeding up even further.

"Ngha?!" Niku yelped. That was finally enough for him to catch her. He held her up in the air by the throat as she slashed his hands to get him to let her go. A painful screeching sound filled the air each time her Golem Blades ground against the metal of his armor, but they didn't leave a single scratch on him. At the very least, we could tell that iron blades wouldn't be enough to do any meaningful damage to him.

"Good. That will suffice for you. You may rest," he said, tossing Niku to the side. She flew several meters before landing on the floor of the arena and sliding to a slow stop.

"Nooow then, it is your turn! Show me your strength!"

"Be gentle... Whoa!"

"Oh? To think that you would be capable of dodging that. You must be well-trained after all."

I dodged his blows according to my instincts, and... got caught in no time. But that still must have been a job well done from Core 50's perspective, given that he grabbed my arm when he was going for my neck. *Welp, I lost.* I prepared myself to be thrown, but Core 50 just let go of my arm and slapped my back a few times. *Gah, ow. Your metal armor hurts.*

"A splendid effort! Keima, was it? I shall call you by your proper name!" Core 50 declared.

"Sure, thanks... Though I'm a backliner, so I'm not too great at hand-to-hand combat."

"If you consider that performance poor, then you shall grow significantly with training. Now is the time for dedication! Though I will also have you do normal slave work," Core 50 said with his armor shaking with laughter.

An elf maid (slave) guided us to a simple bedroom just like the one we had been taken to in Aidy's mansion. *Maybe slaves are actually treated pretty well here?*

"That is because the honorable Lord 50 has decided that you are a special-rank slave, and your beastkin companion is a high-rank slave," the elf said.

"Special-rank?"

"Indeed. You both saw and even dodged his attacks, did you not?"

"Oh, right... Those last few."

Naturally, that had been automatic dodging performed entirely by my orichalcum Golem assistance. In other words I had cheated. Though I ended up getting caught in no time anyway.

"...So I am a high-rank slave," Niku murmured.

"You were marked as a mid-rank slave or above the moment you attacked Lord 50 without fear. By keeping up with him even after he sped up you obtained high-rank. Your young age no doubt made the choice easier," the elf slave continued. She was a mid-rank slave, incidentally, and was in charge of the maids in the mansion. I went ahead and asked how the other slaves were treated, just out of curiosity.

"Mid-rank slaves sleep in group bedrooms, while low-rank slaves go straight to the pigsties," she explained. What she meant wasn't that the low-rank slaves slept with pigs, but rather that they were the pigs themselves. *Thank God I get to be human. I'll keep quiet about my cheating.*

Anyway, for dinner that day, we were served... meat. There was a juicy steak and thick udon noodles.

"Hm? Will you not eat? You must eat to get strong," Core 50 said, having removed his helmet to shovel food down his throat. He had probably transformed into human form first. I looked at the meat on my plate while considering that Haku's subordinate Sally had done the same thing. *I really hope this isn't low-rank slave meat.*

Incidentally, Niku was tearing through her steak without hesitating for a

second.

“Er, Lord 50. What kind of meat is this?”

“Fear not, it isn’t human meat. It’s wild Orc meat,” Core 50 answered, seeing through me entirely. “The livestock killed in human farms have even their corpses turned into DP, so rarely are they put on the dinner table.”

“Ah, I see.” But Orcs are bipedal too, so I feel a little... okay, nah, I don’t feel bad at all.

I went ahead and cut off a bite. It was pretty good.

“I shall teach you how to hunt Orcs. You cut their head off in a single strike and scatter the blood to summon their allies. That will allow you to hunt even more. Only when no allies are attracted by the blood is the hunt over. The large quantity of meat will demand that you hang their corpses in high places such that it does not rot.”

I see. It’s kinda violent, but they know how to drain the blood off meat and let it ferment in nature.

Incidentally, as a demon (i.e. the Demon Realm equivalent of a noble), Core 50 would normally never eat with slaves, but he was treating me as a visitor due to my connection to the Great Demon King and my status as a special-rank slave. Niku was a high-rank slave, but she was tagging along with me.

“Keima, I will have you work alongside the skilled slaves. Though, of course, I will be training you as well,” Core 50 said. This would also be a good time for us to iron out what I would be doing here.

“That makes sense to me, but what exactly do you want me to do?”

“I shall answer that with a question of my own. What are you capable of doing?” he asked, and you know, that *was* a good question. I was just a town chief for show, fighting prowess was commonplace in the Demon Realm, and Beddhism didn’t seem like it would be welcome here. *Does that just leave magic...?*

“...Keima. Core 89 informed me that you came to the Demon Realm to learn. What exactly were you researching?”

“Er... the culture, I guess?” I replied. I had actually come here in search of the Divine Pajamas, and didn’t intend to learn anything at all.

“Very well. In general, I allow special-rank slaves to do the work of their own choosing, since it is most efficient for them to do what they are most skilled at. In which case, I shall have you do a wide variety of work. Finding what you are capable of is an important step toward growing stronger.”

I see. Guess I can claim I’m not good at any of the work and just slack off without getting caught?

“If you show no results whatsoever, I will demote you into a low-rank slave.”

“I shall pour my heart and soul into finding my true calling, Lord 50.”

Core 50 gave me a warning that made it seem like he had read my mind. *His insight is so clean and accurate...! So this is the power of a two-digit Core!*

“Excellent,” Core 50 said, and after finishing off his steak udon, he wiped his mouth, put his helmet back on, and stood in satisfaction. “Incidentally, Keima. The king has informed me that you are a Hero from another world as well. I am looking forward to your wealth of otherworldly knowledge. You may tell me everything without restraint,” he continued before leaving the dining hall.

...Uh, Core 6? Could you not just tell everyone my secrets like that?

Anyway, after a night’s sleep it was time for the next day. Niku woke me up when morning came. She seemed a bit pained to do so considering she normally only woke me up in dire circumstances (including needing to use the bathroom but being locked in my arms), but being enslaved in the Demon Realm counted as dire circumstances, so she had to get over it. It would be a much bigger problem if I overslept here.

After eating a breakfast of udon in our rooms, the elf maid guided us to a training ground. It was a different place from the arena where we had dueled Core 50 yesterday. Given that he was strong enough to win the Demon Tournament, he was a member of the old guard for demons, a powerful noble that had left an enormous mark in history. It only made sense that he would have multiple arenas and training grounds at his personal estate. It was like a

rich person on Earth having multiple pools and tennis courts.

There were multiple men and women working their bodies in the training ground. Naturally, I didn't mean that in a lewd sense. They were training and holding mock duels. There were all sorts of people: a guy with wings, a leopard beastkin woman, an elf, a human-sized locust, a guy with six arms, a person way bigger than anyone else, and so on. There was nothing connecting them whatsoever. If there was ever a melting pot of monsterkind, this was it. And they all had bloodthirsty looks on their faces.

"Hm? A newbie?" said one of the men, sliding out of their midst to come this way. He had a snake tail for legs, which made him a Lamia. He sheathed his two daggers and spread out his arms wide, giving me a broad grin.

"Welcome, brother! I'm Ostle, a high-rank slave. This place is heaven!"

"Y-Yeah? Nice to meet you. I'm Keima," I replied. *I didn't notice, but he does have a collar on his neck. Actually, I guess everybody here does.*

"Ostle, he is a special-rank slave," the elf said in a chastising tone.

"Oh, whoops. You gotta tell me that faster. Welcome, Keima," the Lamia guy said with a bow. *Apparently there's a hierarchy among the slaves too...* I thought while squatting to avoid the tail he had slid behind me to strike at the back of my head. That was my Golem assistance's auto-dodging at work.

"Not bad! That's a special-rank slave for you! Most don't manage to dodge that."

"That's one hell of a greeting. Is that how people say hello in the Demon Realm?"

"Huh? Of course it is, the hell are you... Oh!" The Lamia guy exclaimed, before grimacing awkwardly. He shook his head, then shot me the broad grin he had after first seeing me. "My bad! Are you from the empire? Or maybe Daide? Right, right, you're a human! You're a foreigner! You wouldn't be used to how we greet each other here!"

What the? That's actually how they say hello here? Wow.

"Er, well. The truth is, I just came to the Demon Realm recently. First time

anybody's greeted me like that."

"R-Right. My bad. Hope you can forgive me."

According to the elf maid, in the Demon Realm it was standard practice to launch a surprise attack on someone after introducing yourself if they seemed strong to you. Ostle concluded I was stronger than him since I was a special-rank slave, and thus launched a surprise attack like it was nothing. *What a crazy culture this place has.*

"But still, the fact you dodged it anyway just goes to show how strong special-rank slaves are!"

"Seems like you had eyes on the back of your head, man. You sure you aren't half-arachnid?" called out a nearby slave.

"I can't even tell what tipped him off. Heh, looks we've got one hell of a newbie here," said another.

And so, thanks to Ostle, I was immediately accepted by the group. *Er, uh... Sorry. I do have eyes on the back of my head, because I'm cheating. Not sure they would take me saying that too well, though.*

That was when Niku walked up to stand in front of me.

"Oh, who's this little dog girl?"

"I'm Niku Kuroinu, a high-rank slave. Nice to meet you," Niku said with a small bow. Ostle responded in turn with his own bow. Instantly, the two of them moved so fast they turned into a blur.

"Ngh!"

"Whoa. That was a pretty nice strike."

The sound of clashing metal filled the air. Ostle had blocked Niku's greeting (surprise attack) with his scale-covered tail.

"Alright! I'm gonna train you. C'mon, puppy!"

"Okay. Thank you. Master, I'll be back."

Niku eagerly disappeared into the crowd of slaves. Oh, by the way, Ostle's reaction there was how the person blocking a Demon Realm surprise attack was

supposed to react. *Man, kids sure adapt fast.*

The elf maid then left me at the training ground, saying she'd come get us at noon, so I decided to take my training seriously. I set my Golem assistance to the minimum and started muscle training, which ended up with me getting exhausted in no time. Guh.

"Keima, you sure don't have any stamina. Do you specialize in fast, short battles or something?"

"C'mon, man, one more time! You can do it! And another time! Just one more time!"

"Now that I look, you've got some spindly arms... Want to borrow my arm weights?"

The group of slaves who had been overestimating me started lending a hand after they saw my real power. It all made sense to them when I told them I was a mage, not a warrior. Demon Realm mages were one thing, but a foreign mage being able to dodge that kind of blow would naturally catch Core 50's eyes. They were confident I would grow if trained. Though if you asked me, it was a bit weird that I could still be a special-rank slave despite being physically weaker than basically all the high-rank slaves.

...Holy shit, how many kilos are these arm weights? I can barely lift my arms. Lending me all six of them is kinda pointless when I only have two arms... Wait, what? Put three of them on each arm? No, no, no, no.

We also had some rousing chats about my battle proficiency in general.

"I see, I see. With that kinda dodging speed you can blast them with dodging right after their first attack."

"Chanting fast while dodging? Woof, I feel like I'd bite my tongue for sure."

"Nah, it's probably a slow chant. This is the kinda thing where you chant ahead of time to make things work."

I was just listening as the other slaves talked. Both asking someone to spill their fighting secrets and answering honestly were breaches of manners. Ostle the Lamia guy was surprisingly polite and told me all about this. The reasoning

behind this quirk of culture was that asking about and spilling secrets like that didn't help anyone get stronger.

...The others elaborated a bit. Asking for someone to reveal their battle strategies was like announcing yourself as weaker than them, and informing someone of your battle strategies was like announcing yourself as stronger than them. Disciples going out of their way to train each other was actually an elaborate attempt to end up socially on top. Thus, the battle-frenzied attitude of Demon Realm inhabitants was born.

Hm? But wait, does that mean they're viewing me as an equal even though I'm a special-rank slave? Well, given my physical stats, I should be glad they aren't just looking down on me.

Incidentally, it was normal to get on the back of someone doing pushups when you wanted to do squats, and when someone was doing sit-ups it was normal to lift up their legs and use them as dumbbells. It was pretty impressive that they could do that kind of thing without Golem assistance. *Wait, and Niku is doing it too? Wh-Whew... K-Kids sure adapt fast, huh?*

In any case, by the time noon came, my muscles were guaranteed to be sore tomorrow. Thankful that we had udon for lunch, which was pretty easy to eat without moving too much, I proceeded to use Golem assistance to force myself up for the afternoon. I really wanted to just fall over and sleep, but that wasn't allowed for slaves. *Guess I'm gonna have to turn on my {Sleep Resistance} for a while... I'd pass out in an instant otherwise.*

"...I'm gonna be helping slaves with work this afternoon, right?" I asked the elf maid, fighting back exhaustion.

"Correct. You have been instructed to go to a human farm today. You will be riding a wagon carrying food."

Human farms: places where humans were raised to become DP. They were all over the place in the Demon Realm, with Aidy's Dungeon Master having been from one himself.

...But what do they expect me to do there? The phrase 'human farm' really does not paint a good picture of the place. All I can think of is a bunch of humans chained together in front of a food trough. Niku's gonna be coming

along as my bodyguard, but I'm pretty sure that's not something a kid should be seeing.

In the end, though, my worries were for nothing. The human farm the elf maid and I arrived at in our wagon of vegetables and wheat looked just like a normal village from up on the hill. The only abnormal things were how the densely packed the buildings were, and how there was a big training ground in the center where people were swinging swords and hitting each other with magic.

...Actually, a small correction. It was less a normal village and more like a camp for soldiers. Though there were a lot of kids.

"They live pretty normal lives here, huh? I thought they'd be chained together in barns or something," I said.

"Ah, those human farms are a bit further out. We have no business there today, however."

Wait, those exist too? I can't tell if I think better or worse of the Demon Realm now... Or well, this is just their culture, so I guess it's not my place to judge them at all?

"If you wish to breed with one, I suggest ignoring the low-ranks and selecting one from the mid-ranks or above."

"What?!"

"Oh? Did Ostle not inform you of this?" the elf maid asked, tilting her head. Apparently, high-rank and above slaves had baby-making as part of their duties.

Welp, that explains why Ostle called this place heaven. It's all coming together.

"If you find any girl you like, please feel free to have your way with her. The girls here come from a mana-rich bloodline, so a mage such as yourself will produce quality offspring with them. They will even have attractive appearances due to beauty being one consideration for our selective breeding. There are also dwarves if you prefer your girls on the smaller side."

"...Sorry, but my heart's already set on someone," I replied. The elf maid

glanced at Niku, said “I see,” and entered the town without another word. The guard who welcomed us had as handsome a face as the elf maid implied, but putting that aside, we followed after her into the town.

Once inside, my job was to teach the slaves magic. Or to be more specific, I was to teach them magic spells through training, rather than through using scrolls. My work would thus be to say the chant and cast the spell over and over. The slaves would listen carefully and memorize the chant bit by bit until they could cast the magic as well. As annoying as it was, that meant I couldn’t just cast the spell without chanting. And I couldn’t change the chant either. After all, I knew from my experimentation with Neruneh that changing even something as small as the number of fireballs in the chant would make the entire thing turn out differently. It was a huge pain.

“Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt},” I chanted. The ice bolt shot through the air and hit a target with nothing else happening.

“Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt},” I chanted. The ice bolt shot through the air and hit a target with nothing else happening once again.

“Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt},” I chanted. The ice bolt shot through the air and hit a target with nothing else happening once again.

...And so on. I repeated it over and over and over. The target was made of black steel, so it didn’t break apart from mere ice bolts no matter how many I sent its way. The result was all of the bolts breaking apart and forming a mountain beneath the target.

...Gah. I’m so tired from this morning I just want to pass out. I can just speak on autopilot since I’m not changing the incantation, but my throat’s tired and dry...

I put a hand over my mouth and cast {Water}, the Survival spell. Water appeared, which I proceeded to gulp down. Doing it this way didn’t need a cup, which was a strat I had been taught earlier in the morning at the training grounds. Pretty convenient stuff.

Incidentally, Niku had so little to do that she started training with the slaves

skilled with swords, even though she had spent all morning training already. *Where does all that energy come from? Yaaawn.*

“You seem tired, Keima,” a dark-skinned half-elf girl said.

“Almost outta mana? You’ve already shot a hundred of those,” a red-haired guy said. They were both farm slaves that had come over after hearing me yawn.

“Nah, it’s just so boring that... er, actually, yeah. I’m so low on mana I’m feeling pretty sleepy.”

“Keima. Lord 50 has ordered you to continue casting spells for as long as possible. Please continue until you run out of mana and pass out,” the elf maid said, appearing out of nowhere as if she had sensed that I was about to skip out on work.

Crap. I’ll never friggin’ run out of mana if all I’m doing is casting low level spells like this.

“Please continue.”

“Yeah, yeah... Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt},” I chanted. The ice bolt shot through the air and hit a target with nothing else happening. *Well, the good thing about spell chants is that my mouth just moves on its own once I decide to use it.*

“...Isn’t the ice going to get in the way soon?”

“We will be using it for our ice freezer room.”

“Well, that’s practical. Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt},” I chanted. *At this point I’m just using Golem assistance to keep my arm lifted up as I stand in place... Still, this is exhausting.*

And so, I kept shooting out {Ice Bolts} until the sun was close to setting and it was time for us to go home. I wasn’t allowed a single break, and I kept casting the same spell over and over while drinking water until the elf maid said I could stop. The moment she did, cheers erupted in the vein of “Holy shiiiit!” and “The madman actually did it!” from the surrounding crowd. *I guess that means I was pretty successful here.*

Incidentally, midway through the afternoon they placed a slanted board beneath the target so the ice would slide into a pot and be easier to collect, so I didn't know how many bolts I had actually fired. All I knew was that they would have more than enough ice for a while.

Either way, I forced my thoroughly exhausted body back into the wagon and enjoyed the shaking ride back to Core 50's estate. After somehow getting some steak udon into my stomach for dinner, I returned to my room and instantly turned off {Sleep Resistance}. I fell asleep before I even had time to blink.
Oyasuminasai. Zzz.

Farm Slaves' Perspective

When the slaves of a human farm heard that a special-rank slave was visiting them, they were all eager for his arrival. After all, special-rank slaves were those that the owner of the farm and archduke of the duchy Core 50 had identified as being someone quite powerful. They were all hopeful that he would have desirable seed for strong children.

And so, nobody could blame them for being deeply disappointed when Keima arrived, looking slender and weak. In the Demon Realm, even mages were muscular to the point of being buff, and the only ones without muscles were young children. Really, the dog loli he brought with him seemed a lot stronger and well-trained.

"He's not muscular at all."

"Well, they said he's a magic specialist, so maybe he has a lot of mana? It's hard to tell."

"At the very least, he has to have *some* mana to be a special-rank slave... I hope."

Three mid-rank slaves that had been expecting the most out of Keima all gathered together to express their disappointment.

"...I guess we should just wait and see."

"I don't need any weakling kids. I'm *far* more interested in getting that dog girl to be a mother."

“We can’t turn down a special-rank, but we can kind of avoid him.”

And so, Keima began teaching them {Ice Bolt} in the plaza. All that involved was him repeatedly casting it until everyone else learned it as well. Still, doing such involved a constant drain of mana, so even a fairly skilled magician would only last an hour at best most of the time. Not only would they be learning a new spell, but they would also be figuring out the extent of Keima’s mana by seeing how long he could cast spells before passing out. It was like hunting both an Orc and Minotaur at once. (Translation: A Demon Realm idiom meaning “Kill two birds with one stone.”)

At first, everyone thought Keima wouldn’t have too much mana, given his lack of a muscular build compared to Demon Realm mages, but he continually cast {Ice Bolt} for an hour straight without any breaks. Not to mention, he hit the target dead center each time, never messing up the chant once. The only breaks in his flow were when he wiped his mouth.

“...He’s still casting? Not bad.”

“And his posture is still perfect.”

“Each shot hits dead center. His accuracy is flawless.”

The crashing sound of ice shattering still rang out over and over. He had been rapid-firing the spells from the beginning, so everyone thought he would slow down over time, but his pace hadn’t dropped for a second.

“...I think I might want his kids.”

“He would give strong ones for sure.”

“Since he’s a mage, he won’t be able to fight back much if we push him down to breed.”

Just how much of a magic expert was he? Most of those gathered in the plaza were mages, and they were all interested in magic. They wanted to have a nice, long discussion with Keima. Perhaps he would be able to teach them how to expand their mana capacity as well.

The sun began to set. The ice that they had been planning to take to the ice room once Keima passed out was now being slid directly into a pot to make the

repeated trips easier.

“...A-Am I seeing things?! That special-rank slave has been casting magic for four hours straight!”

“Without any breaks?! But wait, he’s not stumbling over his chants at all!”

“Just how big of a mana dick does he have?!”

Magic chants involved using mana to move your mouth. When low on mana the chants would get disturbed, such that you stumble over it and fail to activate the spell. Thus in the Demon Realm there was a common technique to manually chant the spells to save on mana in situations where one had to cast many spells over a long period of time. It would save a significant amount in the long run—or to be precise, it would lessen the amount of mana used in the spells by half.

But Keima’s chants hadn’t faltered for a moment. Either he was using enormous quantities of mana to automate the chanting, or he was an unparalleled expert at manually chanting. But in either case, he had a staggering amount. Even half of what it would take to cast spells for four hours straight was a shocking amount.

Keima’s reputation on the farm was shooting up faster than the speed of light with no signs of stopping. Regardless of how fragile he looked on the outside, he had enough mana to earn not just a little extra cash, but enough to buy an entire mansion. O, fearsome special-rank slaves. O, wondrous special-rank slaves. It was now clear to everyone why he had earned Core 50’s attention.

Eventually, Keima fired his last spell. He had continued casting until the very last moment, remaining upright until it was time for him to leave. Half a day had passed. The exact number of hours were uncertain, but it was more than six. Nobody could blame the slaves for reflexively cheering.

“...I want to have his babies so bad!”

“He’ll *definitely* give strong children!”

“He’s a mage! If we push him over and hold him down, we can force him to breed with us!”

The three girls resolved to attack Keima on sight the next time he came, no matter what. Suffice to say, they weren't the only ones who had their eyes on him now, and the farm would be absolutely full of rivals.

Keima's Perspective

And so tomorrow came. Niku woke me up and, as expected, my muscles were too sore for me to move. Even my tongue was dead in my mouth due to chanting {Ice Bolt} too much yesterday. Niku poked my cheek repeatedly. *Nguuuh. It huuurts...*

"Master, have you used Restoration magic?" she asked.

Ah! That's right, I have magic! How could I forget? I thought before silently casting {Healing}. It successfully lessened the muscle pain.

"Are you okay, Niku? Like, your muscles and all that. I could cast some magic on you too."

"I'm fine," she said, completely unfazed. Apparently her youth and the fact she actually exercised had prepared her for this. I would expect nothing less from Niku.

After once again eating the breakfast (udon) that was brought to our room, we followed the elf maid to the training grounds. It was the same place as yesterday. She told us to wake up and head there on our own starting tomorrow, but being late was strictly forbidden, which meant no sleeping in. Too bad.

"Heya, bro! I heard you went right to the farms yesterday, eh? How was it? Didja have a good time, o mighty special-rank?" Ostle asked, walking over with a grin on his face.

"How was what?" I replied.

"Y'know what I'm talking about. Only one fun thing to do at those farms. Were the girls falling over you? How long did you spend slapping meat with all of them, huh?"

"Er. Well," I began. I could guess what he was going for, since he wasn't

exactly being subtle. *Guess I'll tease him a bit.*

"Let's just say I was shooting rounds from the second I got there to the second I left."

"Whoa! Seriously?"

"They dragged me away as soon as I got there, and until I left I was shooting my guts out in the plaza."

"Whew! That's pretty bold for a first day!"

"They didn't give me a minute to rest the entire time. I'm exhausted."

"Th-That's so long...! Man, special-rank slaves sure are something else," Ostle said, swallowing hard. Which was my sign to spill the beans.

"I'm not gonna want to shoot any {Ice Bolts} for a long time."

"Yeah, {Ice Bolt}, huh... Wait, {Ice Bolt}?"

"Yep. They told me to keep shooting until I was out of mana, so I went at it all day. That elf maid wouldn't let me rest at all," I said with a shrug. Ostle looked at me with a baffled expression. Meanwhile, I heard someone roaring with laughter from the crowd of training slaves. It was Aknera, the Arachnoid woman with six arms. (Incidentally, Arachnoids were unrelated to Arachnids, with the only similarity being them having eight limbs total. Arachnoids were actually closer to an asura.)

"You sure are kinda uptight for a special-rank slave, aren't ya? I'm guessing you're a virgin somehow. Tell you what, I'll fix that for you," Aknera said. *Man, have these people never heard of chastity?* I shook my head.

"Nah, nah. My heart's settled on someone. Not to mention that I'm only a contract slave, and the contract has an end date."

"Aw, I got rejected. Wait... your contract has an end date?"

Oops. Have I not mentioned that?

"I was sent here on empire business. I ended up fighting Lord 50 at the Great Demon King's instructions after the Hell Tournament, but obviously, I lost. Now I'm stuck as a slave for the rest of the month I was going to spend here."

“Hah! Guess I’ve gotta get your seed even faster than I thought.”

“She’s right, Keima. This is a golden opportunity, don’t waste it on some purity crap,” Ostle added in. It seemed that everyone in the Demon Realm was pretty dedicated to the idea of breeding and colonizing. Breeding to replace the dead was pretty important when constant war and fighting was going on. Not to mention that more strong people meant more DP income.

Well, in any case, we cut the chit-chat there and got straight to training all morning.

“Nice to have a fast learner like you on the field, pup! Makes it all feel worth it. But I gotta ask, have you studied Demon King style somewhere before?” a high-rank slave asked Niku while she was lifting weights nearby.

“Yes. I briefly trained under Aidy.”

“Aidy? Wait... You mean Lady 666?! That’s awesome!”

As one would expect from the name, Demon King style had a lot of practitioners in the Demon Realm, though only noble demons reached the level of an assistant instructor.

I wonder if lifting weights like this will actually make me any stronger, I thought while keeping at it, and before long it was time for afternoon work.

“Am I gonna be shooting magic on the farm all day again?” I asked.

“We will have you work elsewhere today,” the elf maid replied, and told me that I would be helping to make magic tools in a lower city area in Core 50’s duchy. Apparently me casting magic for so long in the human farm yesterday had really boosted my reputation, and if I had so much mana they wanted to see what I could do with making magic tools.

We headed to the magic tool workshop, which was filled with Kobolds, ant-people, and so on working as craftsmen carving the magic circles. It was hard for me to distinguish the Kobolds from the heavily furry dog beastkin, but the elf assured me they were Kobolds.

“Hm? Who’s this, then?”

“Keima, a special-rank slave. Please see what he can do.”

“Alright then. Recognize this, Keima?” a Kobold craftsman asked, handing me a copper board. It had a magic circle carved into it.

...Hm, not too hard to read. Water, creation... The source of energy is here... Alright.

“Looks like a water-creating magic circle to me.”

“Seems like you’ve got the basics down, at least. What about the pup?”

“I’m Niku Kuroinu, Master’s slave. I don’t know anything about magic tools,” Niku said flatly.

“Huh? Why’s a slave got a slave?” the craftsman said, confused. He seemed pretty thrown off by Niku calling me “Master” instead of Core 50. *There’s some complicated circumstances here, I promise.*

“...Anyway. What can you do, then?” he asked, recovering.

“I can fight.”

“You can go and fight with Golems we made out of magic tools, then.”

Golems made out of magic tools, huh? I wonder how they’re different from Golems made from magic, I thought, and Niku went right off to the arena attached to the workshop, which was also known as the hands-on arena laboratory. What a place.

I ended up stuck in no time. They asked me to carve the word for water in the magic circle, and I couldn’t. Whoops.

“Sorry, uh, I can read, but I can’t write.”

“Useless! How can you read but not write? Are your hands too shaky?”

The real answer was that my auto-translator let me read things in Japanese, but it actually blocked me from seeing the actual shapes of the letters and stuff. It was pretty strange, since supposedly I was looking at concrete matter.

“...Fine, fine. Go organize the storeroom, then. The paperwork’s a mess and the young’ins keep putting things in the wrong places.”

“You got it.”

And so, I ended up managing paperwork in the storeroom. *Man, I’m glad I*

just admitted that I couldn't write. Managing paperwork? Sure, sure. I'll manage the hell out of this paperwork.

Kobold Craftsman's Perspective

A weird special-rank slave came to my magic tool workshop. In the end, though, I had to send him to organize the storeroom.

"But y'know, to think he could read but not write... I guess some people just do be like that," I mused. You could learn to read a circle just by looking at a single example over and over, but you needed tools to practice writing, and the metal boards on which you carved magic circles cost money. It wasn't implausible for someone to know how to read but not write.

That said, most people like that would try to write at any opportunity they were given, but that guy just turned it right down.

Anyway, I left him at the storeroom. If he could read magic circles that fast, he could probably organize paperwork without any problems. He was a special-rank slave, so I didn't need to leave any helpers, but...

"Zzz..."

"Uh? This fucker's asleep in the storeroom. Wake up! Hey!"

...He skipped work and took a nap. What a bold guy.

I smacked the special-rank slave awake and he sat up with a grumble.

"Ngh? What'd you do that for? I finished organizing it already."

"Like hell you did," I shot back before looking around the storeroom. In reality, everything was out of order. The documents were grouped by element, but the titles weren't ordered in any discernible way.

"What the hell?! It's even worse than before!"

"Hm? No way, that can't be... Oh." The special-rank slave averted his eyes, as if he had forgotten then remembered something important. "Sorry. I lined them up in my language's alphabetical order."

"HOW?! Where are you from?! You're speaking common language right now!"

How did they end up in that order?! You said you can read, didn't you?!"

"Sorry. It's hard to explain, but there's like, a spell cast on me? A curse? There's nothing I can do about it."

The special-rank slave started listing off excuses. What a useless guy. He couldn't even return the documents to the order they had been in before. I just lost it.

"Get out! There's no work for you here!"

"R-Right. Seriously, sorry about that," the special-rank said while bowing slightly and leaving the storeroom.

Sheesh, what a disaster. I reached out to start fixing up the documents, but...

"Hm? This is one of the magic circles we had filed under 'impossible to read.' Shit, did he just randomly mix these in with the rest?" I said, looking at one of the magic circles put on the Darkness shelf. *Huh. Wait a second...*

"Hrm...? Wait, this is... Pretty sure we couldn't read this due to the damage. But if we assume it's a Darkness circle... Hmmm? O-Oh..." It all came together. It was a Darkness circle after all.

What, did he read this...? This broken magic circle? No way, it mighta been a coincidence, I thought, searching the other shelves.

"This unreadable one's stuck in the place for combinations of fire and water elements... And this one's on the water shelf. Hmmm, that would mean... Oooh..."

The more I found and the more I looked over them, the more they all seemed to be in the right place.

...This one too? Whoa, and even this one?!

I got so absorbed in reading the now-comprehensible magic circles that before I knew it, the sun had set and then risen again. Almost a full day had passed since I drove that special-rank slave out.

Hrm, well, uh... Huh. I'm gonna have a lot of questions for him the next time he comes over here...

Keima's Perspective

Yesterday's dinner was some udon with fresh vegetables. Just in time, too, since I was getting tired of steak udon after eating it for dinner three days in a row. Thankfully they knew to mix things up here.

Anyway, in the morning I lifted weights, then had a different job in the afternoon.

"What's going on today?"

"Monster hunting," the elf maid replied.

"Monster hunting," I repeated, envisioning all of the people I had seen in the Demon Realm. At times it was extremely hard to distinguish between humans and monsters here.

"Heya, Keima! Guess you're on hunting duty today, huh?"

"Ostle...? Oh, right. Of course you don't just spend all day every day in the training grounds."

"The only people who get to just train and breed are the slaves in the farms, my man. Of course I've got actual work to do."

I was headed for the hunting grounds with Ostle, a Lamia guy who was basically the perfect representation of how it was hard to tell humans and monsters apart in the Demon Realm. It was good to know there was someone I knew here.

"I'm pumped to see your magic, Keima. And I already know that pup of yours is gonna contribute a lot," Ostle said with excitement, so I went ahead and asked what was on my mind.

"Hey, Ostle. This might be rude, but I gotta ask. When hunting monsters, how do you tell apart wild monsters and ones that actually live in society? They look about the same to me."

"Hm? Aaah... Right, you were born in the empire. Not gonna lie, telling them apart's gonna be pretty rough for you since it's all in the details. But I can empathize with ya. I know all about foreign cultures," he said with his arms crossed while nodding. "Lemme tell you a rule of thumb. Anyone fluent in

speech is a person, and anything that doesn't speak is a monster you can hunt."

"Are there not species in the Demon Realm that can't talk?"

"Well, it's more a matter of conscious communication than the actual speech. You can have conversations with hand motions and the like. Some people have their throats cut and can't talk, after all. Anyway. If the captain gives Goblins orders and they listen, consider them blood brothers. If the captain gives them orders and they don't, they're dead. Even if someone like me ignores the orders, I'm dead. Simple, right?"

Oh, I see. I just need to think of people as friend or foe. People obeying the Great Demon King are friends, but people disobeying him are foes.

"Hm. But some Orcs live in the Demon Realm as citizens too, right? Should people really be eating Orc meat here?"

"Huh? I'm not following you."

Ah. I see. The Demon Realm doesn't care about cannibalism at all. Food was food, and even if meat belonged to a former ally, it was sustenance. In a way, that's pretty rational.

"Anyway, just kill our enemies and eat them if you want. Don't kill your allies. Follow these two rules and nobody in the Demon Realm will say a word against you. Right, everyone?"

"Yup! Long live the Great Demon King! Long live Lord 50!"

"The Great Demon King prevails!"

Everyone pumped their right fists in the air while cheering, their thumbs thrust upwards. In Japan people would hold both their arms into the air when cheering "long live," but well, the auto-translator was probably doing its best. It happens.

We headed to the hunting grounds, where we got into battle formation. I was put in one of the back rows. My orders were simple: when the captain pointed in a direction and said to attack, just launch a ton of attack magic in that direction. Our goal here was technically to gather food, so it would be better not to launch magic so strong it didn't leave a corpse. The captain was a level-1

citizen or something, and he was a rhino-beastkin with armor on. He was about eighty percent furry, I'd say.

Niku was on the frontlines. She fought the other slaves to get in the frontmost row before ultimately securing her position. *I appreciate the enthusiasm, but try not to get hurt.*

"There! A King Bloody Boar!" shouted the captain. In front of him was a large cloud of smoke, from which emerged a massive boar with dark red blood spilling off it like it was cursed.

"Alright! Charge!" shouted a soldier.

"Idiot! Magic comes first! C'mon!"

Oh, was that my signal? Hyaaaah. {Ice Bolt}, {Ice Bolt}, and how about some {Ice Bolts} and {Ice Bolts}? Maybe an {Ice Bolt} would be nice to mix things up? Here, have a free {Ice Bolt} too.

"...I heard you were an expert at {Ice Bolts}, but uh... This is pretty standard stuff. Hey, special-rank. You got any magic stronger than that?"

"Hm? Er, well..." *Now that I think about it, I showed the whole audience I could cast a ton of spells at once back when I was fighting Core 50. Guess I can go with that.*

I mumbled, pretending to speak out a chant. It was normal to do this in the Demon Realm (since the chant would often spoil what spell you were planning to use in a duel), which meant I thankfully didn't have to think up a fake chant.

"Gatling Ice Bolt," I said, shooting out Ice Bolts faster in both frequency and speed. What had been one swooshing bolt after another was now a rapid-fire spray of multiple bolts at once. The bolts stayed reasonably close together, and if I focused on a single spot they would pierce right through the target.

My Ice Bolts flew toward the King Bloody Boar's nose. They were sucked into its nose, but I shot more, and then more, until eventually... the King Bloody Boar fell to its side, the inertia from its charge causing dust to fly into the air as it scraped across the ground. Blood dripped from its ice-packed nose, and it convulsed while frothing out of the mouth. I stopped my magic.

“Whoa! You, what?!”

“The hell was that?!”

The King Bloody Boar had collapsed before making contact with the group. Apparently the ice stakes had reached its brain through its nose, doing enough damage up there to kill it. *Don't blame me, blame the boar for having king-sized nostrils.*

“I was looking forward to this! Gah, why do you get to have all the fun?!”

“My prestiiiiige!”

“Fuck you! What's the big idea, killing it with just magic?! C'mon!”

The slaves roared with disapproval. I glanced toward the rhino captain, since he was the one in charge.

“I request that you give the others an opportunity to fight, honorable special-rank slave, sir,” he forced out. Apparently what I had done was impressive enough for the captain to get all polite with me. *I'm just glad I can be lazy with fighting the next one. I have his permission, after all.*

For dinner that night we went ahead and had boiled boar udon made with the King Bloody Boar, but so much meat was stacked onto my bowl that I could barely even see over it. I split it with Niku, and by split, I mean I gave her most of it.

Rokuko's Perspective

Keima was taken away by Core 50 as a slave, and in his place Wataru was assigned to guard Rokuko as her slave. She borrowed a collar from Haku and signed the contract right where Keima had been put into Core 50's {Storage}.

And then, regretful beyond words, her responsibilities practically pulling her by the hair, Haku got in her royal carriage and returned to the Laverio Empire, leaving Rokuko in the Demon Realm.

“Okaaaay, and that's thaaat. Serve us well, Wataruuu,” Neruneh said with her lazy tone of voice.

“Right! You can count on me, Neruneh,” Wataru replied, ‘disguising’ himself with a bear hat. He seemed pretty happy to be with the girl he had a crush on.

Sigh. And I was really looking forward to spending time with Keima, too...
Rokuko thought.

“Rokuko, don’t feel so down. Shall we have a dance?” Aidy offered.

“Aidy. Well... I charged up on my Keima energy last night, so I think I’ll be fine.”

Last night, after Keima fell asleep, Rokuko stealthily slipped into bed with him and put on the Divine Comforter. Her one regret was that she had restrained herself, thinking that she had many days with him ahead of her. If she had known what would happen, she would have had a feast. After all, he would think all of it was just a dream.

“In any case, I suggest we go to my duchy,” Aidy said. And indeed they did, riding a magic tool carriage pulled by Sleipnirs. The carriage shook a bit at low speeds, but once it reached the super fast max speed, it stopped shaking at all. A road that would have normally taken three days for a normal carriage to travel was blasted over in half a day.

In other words, by the time they reached Aidy’s duchy the sun had set, and it was deep into the night.

“I wonder if Keima is looking at the same moon right now?” Rokuko wondered aloud wistfully.

“I imagine he is still within Lord 50’s storage,” Aidy replied, utterly shattering her friend’s dreams.

“You know, Aidy,” Wataru began, “I’m surprised your duchy only has a fence marking the borders instead of any walls. I thought you were being pampered, so your whole duchy would have a ton of funding dumped into it.”

“Oh my. What a strange thing to say, Wataru the Hero... or should I say, Wataru the Slave now?”

“What do you mean by strange?”

“Well, if there were sturdy walls, no wild monsters would attack.”

“Huh...? Isn’t that exactly why you want walls?”

“Ah. I’m afraid there is a vast cultural divide separating us,” Aidy replied, forcibly ending the conversation. Wataru shrugged, and Rokuko tilted her head.

“Hm? Come on, explain. I’m curious now. Why don’t you have any walls if you know you’re going to get attacked?” Rokuko asked.

“...How should I put this,” Aidy began, unable to refuse a request from her friend. “Think about it like this. In the Demon Realm, monster attacks are enjoyed as both entertainment and as work.”

According to Aidy, the battle-hungry residents of the Demon Realm would gleefully rise to fight off monster attacks and bathe in the entrails of their victims. Not only that, but buildings destroyed in the attack would provide work for construction workers, and destroyed fields could be compensated for with monster meat (and if anything was missing, the Cores could just stealthily use DP to smooth things over.)

A lot of Demon Realm citizens were from carnivorous species, so you only needed enough vegetables and grains to make udon. Really, a lot of citizens considered farms as just bait for the monsters. Not to mention that the farming itself was done cheaply with free, undead labor. There was no problem at all with them being attacked and the harvest taken away.

“I see, that’s definitely a cultural thing. I never thought of monster raids as fun, or treating farms as bait for them,” Rokuko said.

“Everything is different in the empire, I believe. To think, there exist people who find no joy in fighting.”

“I actually like fighting a lot, honestly,” Wataru said.

“You and Aidy will probably get along surprisingly well,” Rokuko noted. Pretty much everyone in the Demon Realm loved fighting. Throwing a punch at someone’s face was a perfectly normal way to say hello.

In any case, they continued their discussion until arriving at Aidy’s estate.

The next day came. Rokuko was gazing out of her window, her mind in

another place entirely.

“Siiigh... I want to be with Keima,” she mumbled sadly.

“Would you like to exercise for a bit? I believe that will take your mind off him.”

“Aidy, how many times have I said my sword is just ornamental? If you want to duel, you can borrow Wataru.”

“Oh my! How wonderful. I shall do just that, then. And you, Rokuko? Will you watch?”

“Hmm... I think I’ll read a book. Aidy, do you have any books about Demon Realm history, culture, and all that? I might as well take this opportunity to learn.”

“I can lend you some old books scattered around here. I believe Core 42 wrote some of them.”

There were constant wars between duchies in the Demon Realm, and Aidy’s entire duchy (including her estate) had been built by Core 42. It was filled with as many old books as you would expect from a mansion that had been lived in by an ancient first lot Core.

“These seem well worth reading. But wait... wasn’t Core 42...?”

“Indeed. The other fighter in the Hell Tournament’s grand finals. He gifted me this duchy when I defeated him in battle, albeit one where he was handicapped. He wished to leave on a journey in search of more powerful monsters to fight, and having to rule territory so close to the demonic capital was getting in his way.”

Apparently it was possible to use the Dungeon Battle system to bet and fight with the entirety of your dungeon territory.

“Dungeon territory battles are a thing, hm? I never thought about that,” Rokuko mused.

“Though nobody will accept such a battle unless you gamble enough to show that you are serious,” Aidy said, and Rokuko concluded that Father (also known as the Dark God) probably handled the details of that.

Afterwards, Aidy and Wataru enjoyed their fill of a mock battle. Neruneh had occasionally cheered him on a bit from the sidelines while reading one of the books on magic circles Wataru had given her.

Rokuko reached a good stopping point in one of the books Aidy had lent her and found her eyes drawn to the window. Outside was a round, white moon yet again.

“Even in the Demon Realm, the moon just looks like the moon,” she observed.

“I would imagine that today your Master was taken out of {Storage} and began his life as a slave,” came a voice. Rokuko turned and saw Aidy standing in the doorway, grinning with satisfaction.

“So he might be looking at the same moon, then.”

“You are attached to the strangest ideas, aren’t you? What’s so fun about looking at the moon?”

“It’s not the moon that’s fun, it’s the thought that Keima might be looking at the same thing as me. Don’t you ever want to look at the same scenery with the person you love?” Rokuko asked.

“...You know, I think I might understand the feeling,” Aidy replied.

“Oh, now that’s surprising.”

“Come now, really? I can be an emotional girl myself sometimes, you know. I would like the one I love to stand by my side in the field of battle.”

“Oh, okay. We’re definitely on the same page then,” Rokuko replied, looking at the moon again. Battlefields were certainly bloody, but in the end, Aidy was a girl with romantic dreams too.

“...Rokuko, if you would like to see him that much, might I suggest going to Lord 50’s duchy?”

“I can do that?!” Rokuko exclaimed, eyes wide with surprise.

“Of course. That Apprentice Witch of yours wishes to study magic tools, no? It will be simple, then. I can just ask Lord 50 to allow her to study in one of his workshops.”

“Thank you, Aidy!”

“It’s no trouble at all, Rokuko. You will be able to meet your Master even if he refuses to allow the witch to study. I strongly doubt he would die there, after all. But in return, I ask that you lend Wataru to me again,” Aidy said, and the deal was made entirely behind Wataru’s back. It didn’t even need to be said that Rokuko agreed instantly.

“Oh, but it can wait for a few days. I want to finish reading these books first.”

“My my, really? I thought for sure that you wish to meet him at once,” Aidy said, looking at Rokuko with surprise.

“I’ve read in a book that love grows stronger with a little absence. In other words, I’m planning to wait a few days, so Keima will be just dying, dying, *dying* to see me by the time I get there.”

“My my. A soldier of love, aren’t we?”

“Just think. How will he feel when, at his most desperate moment, I appear out of nowhere to see him!”

“...I see! That would certainly land a critical blow on him,” Aidy replied, her heart dancing at her friend’s battle strategy. Love was war. And in war, it was both natural and expected to form plots in the name of securing victory.

“I can meet him whenever I want to, and that gives me an advantage,” Rokuko said.

“You have secured a superior position and are using it to manipulate the battlefield. Spectacular, Rokuko.”

In a way, they were just like any other pair of two young girls, eagerly discussing love and romance at a sleepover.

In any case, some stuff happened, and it ultimately came to pass that Rokuko’s group left for Core 50’s duchy a week later. Naturally, that group included Neruneh as a maid and Wataru as a guard. With Aidy’s Master Sebas driving the carriage, there were five of them in total.

“I wonder if Keima’s doing alright?” Wataru wondered aloud.

“I’m sure he’s fiiine,” Neruneh replied. It felt like the two of them had been spending more time together ever since they arrived at the Demon Realm. Or well, they factually had been spending a ton more time together. While Rokuko was reading books in Aidy’s estate, Neruneh was cheering Wataru on a bit in the arena—going out of her way to bring the study tools and alchemy-related books Wataru had paid to rent for her.

“...So, Neruneh. You seem to be pretty close with Wataru lately. You two sure are together a lot.”

“That’s trueeee. I’m trying to spend time with him where I caaan,” Neruneh said casually.

But you’re MY maid, Rokuko thought, but she ultimately decided to let Neruneh keep doing as she liked since she could use their time spent together as study material to learn from. It helped that with all the servants in Aidy’s estate, Rokuko didn’t exactly need another maid looking after her.

“Incidentally, Wataru the Slave. How has the sole servant room I had the time to prepare for you both been? I imagine there have been no problems?”

“...Er, well, I’ve been managing thanks to the collar,” he replied.

On top of everything, Neruneh and Wataru had been sleeping in the same room—despite the fact that Rokuko, their master, was sleeping alone (albeit after chatting with Aidy up until the very last minute). The shocking truth hit Rokuko with a little jealousy. If only things hadn’t gone so wrong, she and Keima would be sleeping in the same room every night.

“Oh, don’t get the wrong idea, Rokuko. I would never force myself on Neruneh!” Wataru declared.

“Is that true?”

“It’s trueeee. Don’t forget his slave collaaar,” Neruneh said with a smile.

“Naturally, as a slave, I sleep on the floor. Though I do lay out a futon first,” Wataru said. Why did he think it was natural for a slave to sleep on the floor? It seemed he had some uncomfortable prejudice that would need to be questioned.

“By the way, Rokuko. I was a bit surprised to learn that Wataru has a futon in his {Storage} as well. Do all imperials carry futons around with them?”

“I think that’s just Beddhists.”

They chatted in the carriage that Sebas was driving, and if everything went well they would be arriving at Core 50’s duchy by tomorrow morning.

Keima’s Perspective

After a week of living a slave, I had gotten pretty used to their way of life, if I did say so myself. I probably had good enough grasp on the systems to start hunting for a way to get the Divine Pajamas. Aaand that was when Core 50 popped up during morning practice.

“Very good. Training your hearts out, I see,” he said. First Ostle, then all the other slaves stopped training to bow their heads. “Lift your heads and continue,” he continued before walking my way. “Keima, you shall be dueling me this afternoon. Keep your training to a minimum so that you have enough energy when the time comes.”

“Oh, good timing... I mean, understood.”

“I shall see how much you have grown as a special-rank slave,” he said, and with that he left at once. Instantly, a bunch of slaves surrounded me.

“Grats, Keima! You get to fight Lord 50 himself!” exclaimed a slave.

“Gah, I wanna fight him too... You special-rank slaves sure are lucky!” yelled another.

“Oh, but we haven’t had kids yet. Wanna fuck? I’m ready to right here, right now,” said Aknera.

Hold it, what was with that last line? Don’t make it sound like I’m not going to come back alive. And also, no, we’re not going to have kids. It’s gonna be a hard fight, but it’s Core 50 I’m dealing with. He’s not gonna kill me.

Or so I thought, but apparently plenty of slaves had been summoned by Core 50 only to never be seen again. *Welp... Either way, I’m still not gonna have kids with you.*

“Alright! You’re gonna need to be in tip-top shape! Let’s start with some light exercise!” Ostle yelled out enthusiastically.

“Hold it, hold it, hold it. I’m just gonna be preserving my energy here. You all know how little stamina I have, right?”

“Oh, right. We’ll go for a lighter course then. C’mon, Aknera, help us out.”

“Leave him to me! I’ll warm him up so well he’ll give even Lord 50 a good fight!” Aknera the six-armed Arachnoid said before grabbing all four of my limbs and forcibly loosening up their muscles. *Nghuuh!*

...And so, after spending my morning being swung around like a child’s stuffed animal, it was time for my afternoon duel. I was facing Core 50 in one of his mansion arenas. Niku was brimming with motivation for the rematch.

“Now then, Keima. Your work this week has received high praise from all those involved,” Core 50 began.

“Er, great. Does that get me a reward or something?” I replied.

“Hm. Now that I think about it, you came to the Demon Realm to acquire the Divine Pajamas. I have found little use for them, as I do not sleep in bed clothing,” Core 50 mused aloud with a hand on his chin. “Very well. If you land a solid blow on my person, I shall award you the Divine Pajamas.”

“Whoa, really?!”

“To that end, you may attack me with all you have. Such is the role that special-rank slaves are meant to fulfill in the first place.”

There was no audience watching us in this arena, and Core 50 knew everything that Core 6 told him. In other words, he knew that I was a Dungeon Master and a Hero, and here he was saying I didn’t need to hold back on using the special talents those two positions afforded me.

“Now then! Come at me!” Core 50 declared.

“Hyaaaah!” I roared.

“Here I go...!” Niku said.

And so, we lost. Both of us. Horribly.

Seriously? I even used {Ultra Transformation} this time. He dodged {Element Burst} on his first try, and held back on his attacks so they only sent me flying as he hit me over and over. He avoided Niku's critical neck slice while knocking away spells launched from his blind spots. I transformed into a Slime the instant he grabbed me, but he just casually pulled my arm and interrupted the transformation.

All this even though {Ultra Transformation} is my ultimate move, and I can only use it five times a day. Gaaah.

Naturally, we didn't land a single blow on Core 50, and we had basically been dancing on his palm.

"The pup is marginally stronger, but you, Keima, have in fact grown weaker since we last fought. Your power clearly surpasses your skill for wielding it. You would be wise to hone your technique... or rather, I suppose this is the result of you honing your techniques to a half-baked level? Hmm, I might need to rethink your entire education plan. I thought that you would grow stronger if your weak points were ironed out, but instead you became weaker... Will you just not get stronger at all under my methods? Perhaps I need to entrust you to someone else," Core 50, clinking his helmet a bit as if letting out a sigh.

Curse you, Core 50! It's your fault for dodging my attacks like you can read my mind or something. You always make impossible dodges like you know exactly what I'm about to do.

"Quite. You are not far from the truth, Keima. I can read minds, as you are imagining."

"...Wait, what?" Seriously? Wait, wait, wait. No way. Why would he tell me that now?

"You had all that you needed to deduce this except confidence in your belief, and a fourth of your enslavement has passed without that changing. Good grief. Am I not known all throughout the Laverio Empire? I was once called the Knight of the Mind's Eye, you know... Though I suppose I haven't fought in the frontlines for an entire decade. I cannot blame you humans for forgetting me already, considering your short attention spans."

That was my first time hearing that. It certainly explained a lot about his past behavior and actions.

Niku stood up, covered in wounds and bruises. "I see. That explains several moves you made," she said.

"Yes, indeed. You truly are a fast learner in the midst of battle, pup," Core 50 replied. I wasn't exactly sure what they were talking about, but I could guess it was stuff like Core 50 dodging attacks from what should have been unreadable blind spots. "Now then, that will be enough for today. I will not ask for payment for your loss out of consideration for your achievements over the past week."

Ah, right. In the Demon Realm, you always have to duel while betting something on your end. I'm not exactly sure what achievements he's referring to here, but well, I'll take this as him saying that a week of work is worth one attempt at beating him in a duel.

"Pup. I have arranged for an instructor suited to your talents to arrive soon. You may henceforth train under them. Dedicate yourself to learning Demon King style Detachment," Core 50 ordered, and Niku nodded with a frustrated look. She wasn't frustrated at his orders, but rather at the simple fact that she hadn't been able to win. Niku was always hungering to get stronger, and she hadn't been hesitant to embrace Ostle and the others' teachings at all. Demon Realm citizens weren't fond of stealing the techniques of others since it didn't feel so much like growing stronger on your own terms, but Niku had no such misgivings.

"...Incidentally, Keima. Can you read minds as well?" Core 50 asked.

"Uh, no? Not at all."

"...Very well. If you insist."

And so, my afternoon work came to an end. Or it would have, if I didn't have more work to do after it. Core 50 cast Restoration magic on me, and directed me to a parlor for my next job.

"Wait, Keima?! Why are you so beaten up?! Oh, it's just your clothes. Explain yourself."

"Rokuko...? Why are you here?"

There in the parlor I found Rokuko. She was with Aidy, Sebas, Wataru, and Neruneh.

“Why are you all here, actually...?”

“What do you mean, why? Obviously I came to see you because I was worried,” Rokuko said with her chest puffed out smugly.

“Alright then. Thanks. But, uh, I was called here to do some kind of job,” I replied.

“And that is exactly correct, Baron Keima,” Aidy said. She was calling me Baron Keima here since Wataru was with us, though if you asked me, it didn’t feel like it fit me at all. Barons felt more like cartoon villains than a noble low on the political hierarchy, but anyway. “Your job is to entertain us as guests.”

“Entertain you, huh? Not exactly sure what I need to do, then.”

“I have already discussed matters with Lord 50. I will be staying here to see just how far that pup of yours can be trained. You may focus on serving Rokuko, Baron Keima,” she continued. Sebas would service Aidy, while Wataru and Neruneh were stuck with Rokuko.

“That makes this a double date, Keima!” Wataru exclaimed, seeming excited about all this for some reason. On paper he was a slave here just like me, so maybe he had gotten used to Demon Realm culture like I had.

“Sure, but I don’t know much about this place at all. I may have spent a week here already, but slaves don’t get much free time to do what they want.”

“Let’s go on a walk, then. We’ll be fine with Wataru nearby,” Rokuko said. That was fair. A walk through a Demon Realm city would be best done while we had a reliable bodyguard like Wataru around.

“...Master. Am I not reliable after all?” Niku asked.

“Huh? No, no, you’re reliable in your own ways, Niku,” I replied. *It’s just that this is the Demon Realm here. Niku was as strong as any of Core 50’s high-rank slaves, sure, but she wasn’t mind-bogglingly strong. I mean, it was mind-boggling if you considered that she was a loli, but not actually looking strong was a minus point in the Demon Realm.*

“Okay. I will get a lot, lot stronger. So... Aidy,” Niku said, looking toward Aidy.

“Indeed. I have quite a liking for those that have both talent and the determination to grow, just so you know. I shall train you oh so thoroughly, little pup.”

“Yes. Thank you.”

I wasn't sure what exactly had gotten Niku so motivated, but well, I was glad to see her so into this.

“Shall we go then, pup? Have fun out there, Rokuko.”

“Thanks, Aidy. Bye bye!”

And so, after leaving Niku with Aidy, I left for the lower city of Core 50's castle-esque mansion alongside Rokuko, Wataru, and Neruneh. That said, we didn't really know where to go from there. The four of us weren't particularly knowledgeable about Demon Realm cities.

“Why not just try walking down the main street for noooow? We might find some cool stands or shops along the waaay,” Neruneh suggested.

“Genius, Neruneh!” Rokuko exclaimed. Thus began our aimless wandering down the main street. We could all see a map of the city on our dungeon menu, so none of us needed to worry about getting lost except Wataru.

The Demon Realm city was largely similar to an empire city. Both felt like just normal fantasy cities to me, but what separated them were the lack of outer walls surrounding the Demon Realm city, and also what felt like a layer of dirt over everything. I didn't really think too deeply about it, but Rokuko smugly informed me that the lack of walls was to draw monsters in for easy hunting—done both for work and for fun. The fact that they considered enemy attacks to be entertainment was very Demon Realm-esque.

“Keima, there's a market over there! Let's go!” Rokuko exclaimed.

“Sure.”

I headed for the market with Rokuko pulling my hand. The market sold food, but it didn't take long to notice the extreme pricing. The raw ingredients were

so cheap it was like they were being thrown away, but the prepared food was way more expensive. Not to mention, weapons, armor, and magic scrolls were casually being sold right next to the vegetables. I had to question whether those would sell, but then someone did indeed buy some right in front of me. Question answered.

“Weapons break and get worn down so often here, people need replacements all the time,” Wataru observed.

“Interestiing,” Neruneh replied while glancing at a magic scroll. Wataru noticed her gaze and reached for his clasped coin purse. He kept most of his money in the Space-Time magic spell {Wallet}, but apparently he walked around with a physical coin purse too.

“You sure about this, Wataru? She kinda has you by the balls here.”

“It’s fine. Now that I don’t owe you any more debt, I can spend a lot more on her than normal.”

...I’m one to talk, but try to keep your monetary offerings to a minimum, alright? She’s an apprentice witch, not a goddess to appease.

“Anyway, grains and vegetables sure are cheap here, huh? Why’s that?” I asked.

“Aidy mentioned that food was cheap thanks to armies of undead maintaining massive farms,” Rokuko replied. I envisioned a zombie horde tilling farms with hoes, and... it didn’t quite work for me. They seemed more like fertilizer than anything. *Rotten meat fertilizer... Yuck. Hopefully they’re using Skeletons here.*

Either way, her answer made some things click. It was precisely because they had undead hordes doing manual labor and supporting the realm with food that they could focus all their energy onto honing their warrior spirits and bodies. That was one Demon Realm mystery solved.

“Wait, is that you, Keima? What are you doing all the way out here?” came a voice.

“Hm?” I turned around and saw two adventurers (or rather, hunters?) looking this way. *Who’re you two? Not even kidding here. Wait... I feel like this exact thing happened once before?*

“I’m Uzou! You saved my life!”

“I’m Muzou! Sorry for not managing to visit Goren yet!”

“...Oh, right. I think I remember knowing two people by that name. But what’s all this about a promise?”

Uzou and Muzou. I remembered them. They were a pair of C-Rank adventurer brothers that were the Dancing Doll Inn’s first customers, and the first people I saved from the dungeon. They had gotten stuck in the magic blade testing room in an unexpected way, earning us a ton of DP. To thank me for saving them they went hunting for a Magic Blade to replace the Golem Blade, before ultimately finding my best sword, Siesta. It was a valuable blade that spread sleep wherever it went. Not a day went by without it on my hip, including today. There was nothing better against enemies without Sleep Resistance.

“What I want to know is why *you* two are out here. Aren’t you empire adventurers?” I asked.

“Well, we kinda got stuck here due to a mishap during a quest.”

“We saved a noble demon’s life but got hurt in the process, and we’ve been doing quests to try and pay them back for the medical fees.”

At the moment they were visitors at the noble demon’s estate, working to pay back the medical fees. They had participated in the preliminaries of the Fighter’s Tournament (which itself was a preliminary for the Hell Tournament), but lost quickly. They watched one of their hunter friends participate in the tournament proper, then stopped by this city for sightseeing purposes on their way home.

“You guys sure have it rough, huh?” Rokuko commented, sounding a bit sincere. *Well, it’s not as bad as being enslaved like me, so I can’t really comment on it.*

“Keima, are these friends of yours? C’mon, introduce me,” Wataru said while butting in.

“Whoa! Wataru the Hero! What’re you doing here?!”

“THE Wataru the Hero?! The Wataru that won in the Fighter’s Tournament?!”

Shut it, you two, you're being loud, I thought, but by that point word that Wataru the Hero was here had already spread. The flimsy bear hat disguise didn't work on a Laverio Empire native, and anyone who looked at him thinking he was Wataru the Hero would instantly recognize it really was him.

"Wataru the Hero, the human from the empire?! Also known as the Smiling Genocider?! The Jester of Death?!"

"The Grinning Nightmare is here?! I challenge you to a duel!"

"Hold it! I'm the one who's gonna duel Wataru the Funnyman Berserker!"

A crowd gathered instantly. The already crowded market got even more packed, but more than half were demihuman Demon Realm residents, so about seventy percent of the crowd were indistinguishable from monsters. In the center of the crowd were me, Rokuko, Neruneh, Wataru, Uzou, and Muzou. The crowd stretched out two solid meters in every direction, and most of them had on bloodthirsty grins with weapons in their hands.

"Welp... Sorry, everybody. I knew that I was hated in the Demon Realm, but this is more than I expected. Some guard I am. I've gotten us all into trouble."

"...S-S-S-Sorry, Wataru!"

"W-We didn't think this through!"

Muzou and Uzou dropped to the floor in apology as Wataru reached for his sword, a melancholic and distant look in his eyes. The nearby Demon Realm residents exuded killing intent, hyped up as if an entertaining party was about to begin. *Yeah, I feel like I need to stop this before shit gets bad.*

I looked around and saw within the crowd the owner of the stand that had been selling the magic scrolls Neruneh had been eyeing.

"Perfect timing. Hey, Wataru. You want to show off in front of Neruneh, right? Just leave it to me."

"Whoa, Keima? You have some plan to get through this dangerous pinch unscathed?"

Dangerous? What're you talking about, Wataru? I guess empire folks just really don't get what life is like here.

I casually turned to the store owner, who was wielding a knife. “Hey, you.”

“Huh? Me?”

“Wataru’s working as our guard right now, but if you’ll bet all the magic scrolls at your stand, I’ll let you duel him.”

“Alright! Sounds good!” the stand owner replied before rushing over and bringing back all the magic scrolls from the stand.

“There you have it, Wataru. Take ’em out one by one. Anyone else who wants to duel Wataru, go bring something to bet! The arena will be that plaza over there!” I announced, and the crowd dispersed, hunting for stuff to bet so they could duel too.

“Huh? What? The heck is going on?” Wataru said, blinking in surprise.

Well, I can hardly blame someone unfamiliar with Demon Realm culture for being surprised. A week ago I would be reacting in the same way. From Wataru’s perspective, an angry mob just dispersed in the blink of an eye.

“They all had so much bloodlust, too... What in the world happened?”

“All of them just wanted to duel you, Wataru. That’s all. Now, let’s go so we don’t get in the way of these stand owners trying to do business.”

“Wh-Whaaat?”

I pulled the confused Wataru toward the plaza. Demon Realm cities had plenty of open, arena-shaped plazas to accommodate the many duels that broke out at all times. Ostle and the others had told me all about them. It didn’t take long for a line to form, full of people waiting to fight Wataru.

“Graaah! Take this, Smiling Genocider!” roared a challenger.

“Hyah,” Wataru shouted as he sent challenger after challenger flying without even using his sword. Cheers erupted from the crowd each time, and the next person in line raced forward eagerly to fight. They all wore broad smiles filled with bloodlust. The defeated challengers cursed their defeat and left the arena without a fuss, talking about how they would win next time. Their smiles were broad as well, but lacking the bloodlust.

“Okaaay, all challengers please sign heeere. This is very nice scrooooll!”

Neruneh exclaimed. She was working as a receptionist, taking payment from all the challengers.

Rokuko and I, plus Uzou and Muzou, watched all this go on while eating some sugarcane that had been gambled. They were sweet and pleasant.

“H-Huh? Er, Keima? What’s going on here?! Explain!” Wataru yelled while punching a challenger in the face and sending another flying.



“Actually, Keima, I don’t understand either. What *is* going on here?” Rokuko asked, tilting her head in a cute way. I was ignoring Wataru’s questions, but if Rokuko wanted to know too, I might as well answer. After all, my job was to entertain her as a guest.

“The important thing here is to know that Demon Realm citizens think about things fundamentally different from us,” I began. To them, duels were an expression of love. It was a thought process imperials could hardly understand, but Demon Realm citizens generally wanted to have duels to the death with the people they loved. It went like so:

“This person is my friend and I like them.” → “I wonder how strong they are?” → “I’ll fight them (this is fun!)” → “I’m even closer to them, and I like them even more!” → “I wonder how strong they are when they’re taking the fight completely seriously?” → “I’ll fight them to the death (this is incredibly fun!)”

And that was that. If their opponent actually died, the survivor would just casually accept that, having a yandere-like moment where they rejoiced in the fact that only they knew how strong the deceased would get when fighting to the literal death. Though, naturally, that would still count as murder if the terms of the duel weren’t firmly established beforehand. People close enough to fight to the death would agree to it since they would want to know the max power of the other. It would also be fine to cancel the duel to the death if they were sick the day of or something like that.

“So basically, Wataru is super popular?”

“That’s exactly right, Rokuko. He is super popular.”

“Huh?! But there’s no reason for them to like me! I should be a war criminal here!”

“Let me put this simply: Demon Realm citizens like people largely based on how strong they are. Done,” I explained. Wataru the Hero was strong, so it was only natural that he would be extremely popular in the Demon Realm.

Not to mention, all those nicknames from before were Wataru’s nicknames—the Smiling Genocider, the Grinning Nightmare, the Funnyman Berserker, and so on. I asked one of the challengers about it, and apparently he had gotten

those nicknames due to how he always killed his enemies on the battlefield with a smile on his face. The number of his victims was so enormous that he was even something of a celebrity in the Demon Realm, garnering a lot of attention.

“Those nicknames are supposed to be a good thing?! They make it sound like I’m their worst enemy!”

“But in reality, they’re your fans. They love you, man. Isn’t that right?” I called out to the crowd, and they responded in turn.

“Yup!”

“We sure do, so lemme fight you already!”

“You killed my bud, Wataru! I wanted to kill him too, but you got to him first!”

Each call from the crowd was filled with excitement and adoration.

“...They all sound violent to me!”

That called for a change in framing. “Attention, all those who want Wataru’s signatuuure! He will sign anything you want if you can wiin!”

“Oh, I want that!”

“We get signatures for winning?! Hell yeah!”

“Now I’m pumped!”

Hopefully that made it more clear they actually did like him.

“This is hard to believe, but... I guess it’s true. Ahahaha... Ahaha?” Wataru laughed, uncomfortable.

“Oh, I see. That explains Aidy,” Rokuko said. Aidy certainly did like her a lot. She kept challenging Rokuko to duels even though she couldn’t fight at all.

“Keima, I’ve been in the Demon Realm for kinda a long time, but that’s my first time hearing that. Right, Uzou?”

“Yeah, Muzou. I thought we were dead for sure,” Uzou replied. The two brothers were relieved that the danger had passed, but they didn’t understand exactly how.

“Let’s see... I’m guessing you both look weak enough that nobody thinks dueling you would be worth the time. Humans are looked down on here, so.”

Uzou and Muzou froze with frowns on their faces. Some realizations were probably being made in their heads.

But man, Wataru really is strong, huh?

I had a lot more respect for him now that I had trained beneath Core 50. Heroes became specialized one-man armies after training daily, polishing their skills, and constantly racing to greater heights. No way would they be weak. I hadn’t considered Wataru to be weak before now, but I guess I had developed a better sense for who was strong and who wasn’t? I had been cultured? Something like that.

In any case, my thoughts were interrupted by Uzou pointing at my hip. “Hey, Keima. I’ve been wondering for a while now, but is that sword on your hip, y’know...”

“Hm? Uzou, what’re you... Oh! No way, is that what I think it is?!” Muzou also looked at my hip, or rather, my sheath with Siesta in it. I lifted it up a bit so they could see it better.

“Yup. It’s the Magic Blade you two gave me.”

“Siesta, the Blade of Afternoon Naps! I can’t believe you’re still using it...! Right, Muzou?”

“Uzou, I don’t think I’ve ever been as happy as I am right now...!”

These two sure like to exaggerate, I thought just as they took out their Golem Blades. They were one-handed knives; I remembered giving them as gifts in return for Siesta.

“We’ve been using the Magic Blades you gave us too.”

“Yeah. They’re our treasure. Though they stopped working lately since we used ’em too hard.”

“Hm? Lemme see them,” I said, taking the two Magic Blades from them.

...Ahhh, these Golems are dead. Using them as swords inevitably means hitting things, and while they’re shaped like blades, they’re still Golems. The

physical hits will make them lose their HP or whatever. They weren't living creatures, so they didn't regen HP naturally. In short, they'll eventually die and stop moving.

And the Golems of these two Magic Blades had died. I had designed them with some counterbalances for this, but the blades had been used so much there was no avoiding their death. *Kinda feels nice to know something I've made has been getting this much use.*

"...{Revitalize}." I stealthily cast {Create Golem} on the blades to revive them. While I was at it I fixed the chipped parts of the blades, pretending to cast {Revitalize}, which was a Survival spell that brought life back to earth. I had seen Kantara do this back in Goren.

"Alright, fixed. You two're lucky you saw me," I said, handing the Golem Blades back after using mana to double-check that they were working again.

"...Huh? Wh-What? H-Hold on a second, Keima!"

"What'd you do? W-Was that the Survival spell {Revitalize} just now?"

Uzou and Muzou were shocked. *Well, can't blame them for being surprised that their broken Magic Blades were fixed with just a wave of my hands.*

"Yeah. A blacksmith back in my town told me about this, but think about it. Swords are metal, right? And metal comes from the earth. It's basically earth itself. So sometimes, casting {Revitalize} on swords will pep them up. It's lucky that your blades were still just barely alive."

Incidentally, I had already confirmed through experimentation that the spell actually did heal Golems a bit. In other words, it actually would lengthen the lifespan of Golem Blades. Though it wouldn't do anything if they were dead.

"...Keep this to yourself, though, since it's kind of a trade secret."

"R-Right... Thanks. I'll start casting {Revitalize} on it every day from now on."

"E-Er. How much do we need to pay?"

"Nothing, nothing. Siesta's been doing a lot of work for me. Consider this a gift," I replied. *Seriously, Siesta is a pretty crazy blade. So much so it's been embraced as Beddhism's Holy Blade.* "Which reminds me. We've been talking

for a while, but I'm gonna guess you have somewhere to be today, no?"

"Huh? Oh! R-Right! C'mon, Muzou!"

"Gah! I forgot all about that! Shironaga's gonna be pissed! Let's go, Uzou!"

The moment I pointed out the time, they promised to pay me back later and raced off.

"...Sure was nice of you to fix their swords for free," Rokuko said, scooting closer to me.

"What can I say? I owe them for finding me Siesta." *Oh, Wataru just took another one of them down. He sure is strong.*

"By the way, Keima. Do you think you'll be able to get the Divine Pajamas?"

"Uhhh..." I trailed off, looking upwards. That alone was enough for Rokuko to know things hadn't gone as planned. "He did end up agreeing to give them to me if I can get a clean hit in during practice, but I didn't quite manage it."

I updated Rokuko on the situation, including telling her about how I was training every day.

"That's Lord 50 for you. Normal strategies won't work on him."

"Turns out he can read minds, too."

"Uh-huh. He definitely can."

"Wait, you already knew that, Rokuko?"

"Aidy's duchy used to be ruled by Core 42, and he had notes on his battles with Lord 50 inside. He wrote that Demon King style Detachment was good for fighting him."

"Interesting. Pretty sure Lord 50 told Niku to learn that." *I can guess that Aidy and Sebas are teaching her Detachment right now. Pretty sure Detachment refers to, like... freeing your mind of all thoughts and emotions to fight on pure instinct. Not really sure how it works in practice, though.*

The sun had started to set, so I put an end to the bout of duels. "Alright, that's it, everyone! Go home!" I announced while clapping my hands. The challengers all looked up, only then realizing what time it was.

“Gaaah! You’re too strong, Wataru! See you next time! Man, that was fun.”

“I’ll come at you with my full power next time! Don’t die until then! Your life is mine!”

“Man, Wataru was something else. That was just what I’d expect from the Smiling Genocider and his deadly blade... Wait, he didn’t use his sword on any of us?!”

The challengers all left in a good mood. Wataru, seeming a bit tired, saw them off with his usual smile. “Ahaha. This is some country, huh? I think I might have misjudged the Demon Realm. It’s like the entire country is as nonsensical as Goren.”

“You’re making it sound like my town is crazy or something, Wataru.”

“Good, because that’s what I meant.”

But my town is super normal... Strange.

“Wataru, this is incredible! There’s so many magic scrolls, thank yooou!”

“Hey, I’m just glad you’re happy, Neruneh.”

Wataru melted like a puppy before Neruneh’s smile. *Don’t be fooled, brother. You earned all that loot and she’s just gonna take it for herself.*

Though, I wouldn’t be so rude as to actually say that. Wataru had fought all of them with giving the loot to Neruneh in mind, so it was fine.

“Anyway, let’s go home,” I said.

“Uh-huh. I think that should do it for today,” Rokuko replied with a smile. *All we ended up doing was watch Wataru throw challengers out of the arena all day, but okay.*

Incidentally, we were served beef udon for dinner, but due to eating with Rokuko earlier I decided to stash it in {Storage} for Ichika to eat later.

* * *

Core 50 mentioned changing my training style or something of the sort, and so starting the next day I was brought outside of the estate for morning training. The elf maid guided me to the destination—a secret training spot by

the rocky cliffs outside of the city, where not many dangerous monsters wandered—with Rokuko and the others tagging along for some reason. Niku was absent, since she had her own training with Aidy.

“Sooo, can I just make some teaaaaa? I think I should make teaaaaa,” Neruneh suggested as soon as the elf maid got us where we needed to be and left to go do work elsewhere.

“Oh, good idea. I’ll make sure there are no monsters around,” Wataru replied, following her. *Aren’t you two supposed to be Rokuko’s guard and maid or something?*

“I told Neruneh to take Wataru and leave once we got here, so it’s fine. We can actually do whatever we want here since it’s technically outside of Lord 50’s territory,” Rokuko replied. She had been asked by Core 50 to make me stronger, and she was invested in getting that job done. Apparently he had settled on entrusting my training to Rokuko, my partner, and she instantly agreed since it would mean spending more time with me.

“Anyway, Keima. Let’s start by exploiting your specialties as much as possible.”

“My specialties?”

“You have three main skills: dexterous fingers, otherworldly ideas, and bluffing. It would be pretty pointless for you to just train your physical strength under Lord 50, though having more stamina and such is definitely not a bad thing,” Rokuko explained. I couldn’t tell if she was complimenting me or insulting me.

“So, what’s the plan?”

“Mm... Oh, I have an idea. I’ll roll the DP gacha and decide based on what comes out.”

You’re really just gonna leave it all to luck...? Well, maybe that’s actually a good idea, considering how insane her luck is. Maybe some of Wataru’s {Ultra Good Fortune} will rub off on us since he’s so close, too.

And so, partially to get a glimpse into the future of my training, Rokuko rolled the gacha once.

“Go forth, 1,000 DP gacha! Give me some magic scrolls or something!” she exclaimed while rolling, and soon a magic circle spread out in front of us. Aaaaand a scroll plopped onto the ground. She had predicted exactly what would come out. A smug grin spread across her face. “Well?”

“...I’m impressed you predicted what would happen. Good going, Rokuko.”

“I was in a ‘scroll’ mood today. So, Keima. What kind of scroll is it?”

“Mm, let’s see here...”

We could see the names of scrolls in the catalog, but no such names were attached to physical scrolls. Since you needed to pour mana into scrolls to use them, you could look at the magic circles on them to predict what spell they contained, which would allow you to tell if you already knew the spell or not. The scrolls sold in markets had all been identified by someone who knew the spell already.

I opened up the scroll and used the auto-translator to read the text on the magic circle, and... *Alright, this is a new spell. Create, hole, and earth...* Interesting.

“Seems like a harmless spell, so I’ll try using it.” I poured mana into the magic circle and was instantly blessed with knowledge of the skill, plus how to use it. It was {Pitfall}, a spell that, uh... made pitfalls. *Making pitfalls is a good match for Dungeon Masters, but it’s kinda useless in a lot of cases thanks to the dungeon functions.*

While we were at it, Rokuko took out a {Stone Pyre} scroll to work with the pitfalls. It was one of the scrolls that Neruneh had wrung out of Wataru yesterday. Apparently she had gotten two of them.

“You can use this to drop a stone stake into a pitfall after someone falls in,” she said.

“That’s pretty brutal. Good idea, though.”

Thus I learned {Stone Pyre} after {Pitfall}.

“Okay, give it a shot, Keima. Behold the might of the {Pitfall} I got for you!”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll start with the chant. O earth, form a hole... {Pitfall}.” I pressed

a hand to the ground and activated the skill. A hole about one meter deep opened up right in front of me.

“Wow, that hole sure opened up fast,” Rokuko observed.

“Yeah. Felt more like space distorting than the ground getting dug up.”

The skill, in practice, was like driving a thin stake of mana into the ground, then creating a cylindrical pillar of Space-Time. *Why is this Earth magic...? I feel like it should be Space-Time magic.*

“So, you can modify it just like you can modify {Create Golem}?”

“Yeah, probably. Maybe like this... O boulder, form a hole... {Pitfall}.” I placed a hand on a random boulder and activated {Pitfall} sideways. A hole opened up in the side of the boulder, going all the way through it.

“Wow! You can make a tunnel in one second with this!”

“I don’t think so. The pitfall goes away when I cancel the spell,” I said, and upon demonstrating the hole snapped away, leaving the boulder whole once more. *I guess it’s just distorting Space-Time, then? I wonder what happens to whatever’s inside the hole when the spell is canceled.*

Naturally, I got right to experimenting. I tossed a rock into a {Pitfall}, canceled the spell, and... the rock plopped right out.

“...I guess you can’t launch rocks from it, or close things in,” Rokuko observed.

“You think so? I’d say it’s too early to make that call.” I cast {Pitfall}. Then I cast another {Pitfall} on the bottom of the first one. The two holes formed something like a very steep, two-step staircase. I tossed a rock inside and canceled only the first pitfall. The result was a rock completely locked inside the second one. “And done. You can close it in like so.”

“...I see, I see. You definitely can enclose things, then.”

“Yup.”

“So, what happens to the rock if you cancel the lower hole?”

I gave it a shot. But whatever happened occurred underground, so I couldn’t say much for sure. All we knew was that the rock didn’t pop back onto the

surface.

“I guess it’s buried...?” I said, uncertain.

“Try using a Golem this time. That should let you see what happens.”

“Good point.”

I repeated the process, but with a Golem instead a rock. The result was... confirmation that the contents of the second pitfall ended up sealed inside the earth. It felt like the surface of the ground bulged just a bit. The holes were too deep to say for sure. I tried again, with the “lid” pitfall being more shallow this time. That led to the Golem ripping right through it, emerging from the ground completely.

“Alright, I get it. Seems like burying things alive should be pretty easy.” *Plus, I get the feeling this will be pretty useful for destroying things from the inside.*

“You know, once you close the top, it’s impossible to tell the trapped part from the normal ground,” Rokuko chimed in.

“Yeah, it’s pretty useful for making actual pitfalls too. I wonder if I can make it that way from the start?”

I slid the stake of mana into the ground sideways so it was completely underground from the start. When I cast the spell, I felt it activate, but the surface seemed unchanged.

“Nice! It worked.”

“Now we can make as many pitfalls as we want!” Rokuko exclaimed.

“Pitfalls that disappear when the spell is canceled, but yeah. Or actually, maybe it’s safer that way? I have so much mana I don’t really need to think about mana costs.”

Impaling things with mana stakes felt fairly similar to pouring mana into things for {Create Golem}. Next, I could try out opening holes in things other than dirt and rocks.

“Keima, I brought suits of armor just in case something like this happened!”

“Good thinking, Rokuko.”

Rokuko took out a set of metal armor and leather armor from her {Storage}. They seemed like perfect things to experiment on. My experiments showed that... holes were opened up in both sets of armors with no issue whatsoever. *Uh... isn't this kinda crazy? This lets us just ignore armor entirely.*

"Okay, next we should experiment on living things!" Rokuko exclaimed before taking a Goblin out of storage.

...Why the hell does she have a Goblin stashed in there? I guess I shouldn't have expected anything less from a Goblin fetishist... Also, I feel conflicted about that since I was stashed in Core 50's {Storage} earlier. Feels bad, man.

I tried opening a {Pitfall} in the Goblin. And... the mana stake was deflected with a clink. It was incredibly hard to pierce the Goblin itself, maybe due to it having mana of its own. But it wasn't impossible to pierce it. I forced the stake through it, piercing the Goblin's stomach. It went all the way through to its back. The Goblin stood unfazed, probably not feeling any pain at all. *This probably is gonna be pretty useless if it took this much work just to pierce a Goblin of all things.*

Anyway, I activated the spell, and it opened up a big hole in the Goblin's stomach.

"...Whoa."

"Um, ew? What's even happening?"

Despite a hole being opened in its stomach, the Goblin remained unfazed. No blood or gore was falling to the ground. It was like a wall of mana had been stuck on top of him and nothing more. Maybe his insides were connected to some parallel dimension or something.

"Okay, Keima. Jam a stick into the hole and turn off the spell so we can see what happens."

"That's kinda fucked up, Rokuko."

Naturally, that experiment was a bit too gruesome for testing on an innocent Goblin. She stashed the little fellow back into {Storage} while I opened up a tunnel through a boulder and put a stone stick made from {Create Golem} into it. Then, cancel... The stick was pushed out incredibly hard. But it stopped the

instant it was outside the pitfall, all of its inertia gone.

“Seems like it was just pushed out normally.” *Guess I can’t use this to make a pile bunker, then. Maybe I could use it for a vise or something.*

“Looks like it’s pushed out to prevent overlap. What would happen if you connected the two ends?”

At Rokuko’s suggestion I made the tunnel, stuck a stone stick into it, then bent the stick with {Create Golem} to make a stone loop. It was like a big ear piercing. Then, of course, I canceled the spell. The rock ring snapped to pieces and crumbled to the ground.

Is this useful...? In any way...?

“Maybe a ring of orichalcum wouldn’t break.”

“Are you okay, Rokuko? Is something wrong? These last few ideas have been pretty messed up.”

Last up was testing with {Stone Pyre}, but I was already exhausted. Mentally speaking, that is. I still had plenty of mana.

“Keima, could you try replacing the stone part of the chant with orichalcum?”

“The chant is just ‘spear of stone, be born,’ so yeah. Let’s see... Powder of orichalcum, be born... {Stone Pyre}.”

The next instant, I passed out. I changed the spell to be powder because I had a bad feeling about it, but even so all my mana dried up in a second. I probably would have outright died if I had said ‘spear’ instead of ‘powder.’

...Incidentally, it was only a few specks of dust, but the spell did successfully make orichalcum. Though Rokuko never would have found it if it wasn’t marked on the map, apparently.

* * *

I woke up feeling as if I had fallen for a long time. When I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was the elf maid’s face as she peered down at me. “Ah. Finally awake, I see.”

I was resting on top of my futon within Core 50’s mansion. Apparently I had

been brought back to my room after running out of mana. Which, incidentally, had fully regenerated while I slept. My body seemed fine as well.

“Sir Wataru brought you back to the estate, and I had assumed you would be unconscious until tomorrow, but... I see that you will be capable of completing your afternoon work.”

“Uh, wait. I just passed out in the morning. Don’t I get to rest this afternoon just in case?”

“No. That won’t be a problem, will it?”

“...Not at all.”

And so, I was sent to work, having been given no time to rest. *Gaaah.*

My afternoon work was helping at the magic tool workshop again.

“Wait, Neruneh?”

“Masteeer, are you feeling betteeer? You seem betteeer.”

“Er. Yeah.”

I had thought they poured a barrel of mana potions down my throat while I was sleeping, but in reality they had used the Divine Quilt to heal me. The problem was that Wataru, one of Haku’s agents, had seen everything.

Anyway, the last time I was here at this workshop they called me useless and kicked me out, so... I had no idea what I was doing here again.

“I called for yooou.”

“You did, Neruneh?”

“They want to make a Golem out of magic tooools, and weeell, I thought you would have good ideas, Masteeeer. Then we started talking about what technology we should offer as payment for them teaching meee.”

Hm? Wait, so they want our technology as payment for teaching you? I don’t really want to spread our technology like that, but I guess we gotta do what we gotta do.

“Okay. They want to make a Golem, right? How about we just make a Dai-Frame, then? They don’t look like Golems, but they’re pretty useful anyway.”

“Dai-Frame... Ooooh, the Golem you ride iin. That’s perfeect.”

Once Neruneh and I settled on what technology we’d be trading, the Kobold craftsman came walking over. “Ah! There you are, special-rank! I’ve got some questions for you!”

“Heya. Sorry about last time. So, you’re gonna be teaching Neruneh how to make Golems out of magic tools?”

“Yup, yup. And we wanna use your knowledge for it,” the Kobold said, his tail wagging. He seemed in a much better mood than he had been last time.

“Alright. I’ll teach you how to make a Dai-Frame, then.”

“A Dai-Frame?” the Kobold replied, blinking in confusion.

Several hours later, I finished constructing a rideable Golem frame without using {Create Golem}. It was experimental and made small so a Kobold could ride it, but yeah. It was pretty impressive craftsmanship if I did say so myself—layers of metal plates with magic circles carved into them for control and power. For a bit, I didn’t think it would actually be possible, but in the end it all worked out.

“Whoooa! Th-This this, this is something else!” the Kobold explained as he hopped right in and started swinging the arms around. His tail was swinging with absolute joy.

“Eheheh, I learned a lot tooooo. There sure are a lot of magic circles for moving thiiings, aren’t theeeere?”

“Can’t believe you can actually ride Golems and control them...! The controls aren’t complex, and they do the thinking themselves... Feels like my body’s just gotten bigger!” he exclaimed, his tail almost ripping off from the force of the wagging. Kobolds were all pretty small, so getting a bigger body was probably a dream of theirs.

“This will probably be useful for loading cargo onto carriages and stuff. Maybe it’ll help people move houses easier?” I suggested.

“Plus, if you take the pieces apart, the frame barely takes up any space...! This

is incredible! Dai-Frames are incredible! To think that the empire would have technology this advanced...!”

“It doesn’t.”

“Wha?”

“The empire doesn’t have magic tools like this. The Dai-Frame was designed by a guy named Narikin, and it hasn’t spread at all. Only I and a few others know how to make these.”

“No way...!”

It would be a bit problematic if something I designed was exported back to the empire, so I went ahead and used Narikin’s name here. That way Neruneh could make them at home saying she learned to make them here in the Demon Realm. *And I haven’t lied, so everything works out.*

“Anyway, all you gotta do now is teach Neruneh a bunch of stuff to pay us back.”

“You got it! Bwahaha!”

By the time we were done it was about time for me to leave, so I went ahead and returned to Core 50’s estate while the Kobold started running around in the Dai-Frame. For dinner I ate beef udon with Niku in my room.

...Don’t they have anything to serve with this other than meat? Like fried food, or tempura, or... anything. At least they have a lot of different kinds of meat. I wonder if they’re giving Rokuko and others different stuff to eat?

* * *

The next day, Niku and I went our separate ways to go train again. Neruneh and Wataru once again kept their distance from Rokuko and I.

“Since you passed out yesterday, Keima, let’s continue with the {Stone Pyre}.”

“Alright. Also, I’m impressed you managed to find that orichalcum dust, Rokuko.”

She had a small jar with her, which upon closer examination had enough orichalcum dust to last about one second in an hourglass.

“Eheh. I have orichalcum as a valuable item, so I can find it on the map.”

What the hell? We could probably use that to find ore veins or something.

“Okay, let’s get back to {Stone Pyre}. Let’s start with iron.”

“Sure. Stake of iron, be born—{Stone Pyre},” I chanted, and an iron stake resembling a pillar shot out of the ground with no issue whatsoever. Despite not being stone, I didn’t feel any mana drain. Easy.

“Keima, what about mithril?”

“Stake of mithril, be born—{Stone Pyre},” I chanted.

Whoa, holy crap, I felt my mana store just plummet. Looks like the mythril stake came out just fine, though. Hm... I get the feeling I’ll need to make smaller stakes for hihi’irokane and adamantite if I don’t want to pass out again.

“So, it looks like the pillar’s coming out of the ground. Does that mean the mana is just making the mithril outright?” Rokuko asked.

“I mean, probably?”

“In that case, what would happen if you tried to spawn one from a living thing instead of the ground?” Rokuko pulled out another Goblin from {Storage}. *Wait, that’s the same one from yesterday. Let’s, uh... Let’s give him some armor and test that.*

The result was that I could spawn the pillars from metal armor, but not leather armor. The Goblin itself didn’t work either. It seemed the spell needed ground, metal, or some other Earth-related element to activate.

“Hold on a second. It might just be that you can only make a certain element from something of the same element. Can you grow wooden stakes from a wooden board?”

“Let’s give it a shot. Stake of wood, be born—{Stone Pyre}. Aaand... nope.”

I tried spawning wooden stakes from the ground as well, but that failed too. Both the base and the stake needed to be Earth for it to work.

“And jewels?”

“Let’s see. Needles of ruby, be born—{Stone Pyre}... Oh, it worked.”

I had used needles out of fear for the mana cost, but it ended up succeeding with a surprisingly slight mana drain. It was still more mana than mithril, but I wasn't really sure what was defining the costs.

"Needles... If you had metal plates on your palms, you could grow needles out of them. Neat," Rokuko observed.

"You want me to be an assassin?"

"Actually, if someone's wearing metal armor, you could make needles and shoot spikes inside of it."

"That's kinda terrifying."

The experiments showed that the spikes could indeed be made from within metal armor. I could even make needles from the small metal studs and straps on leather armor. *Now this is scary.*

"...Even {Stone Pyre} is a terrifying spell! Is nothing sacred?!"

"I mean, Keima, with your modification ability, basically any spell can end up extremely violent."

"That's... Okay, fair. You got me there."

I started practicing the act of making needles shoot out of a coin in my palm while Rokuko tapped the first spikes I made out of metal while thinking.

"Hm? Come up with any good ideas, Rokuko?"

"...Hey. Do you think you could make this into a Golem with {Create Golem} too?"

"I mean, probably? {Create Golem}."

I poured mana into the spikes I had made to turn them into Golems. *Yep, easy. They turned right into Golems. Though... Wait. Doesn't that mean I can make Golems without paying for the cost of materials? Even for things like mithril and rubies...? Uh-hh. Holy crap? {Stone Pyre} is straight-up a cheat skill. I can make as much material as I want with it. Sure, it's limited to Earth-esque materials, but still.*

For example... I could use {Stone Pyre} to make a stake of iron on my palm,

then use {Create Golem} to turn it into a Golem Blade. I'll be able to make an infinite amount of swords as long as I have mana. Come to think of it, since this is just a normal spell that's sold in markets, maybe both the Demon Realm and the Laverio Empire have so much stone architecture since they're building everything with {Stone Pyre}? I mean, it's a cheap way to convert mana into infinite resources. I can't blame them for using it.

"Why not try spawning them as {Golems} right from the start? Like, casting both the spells at once."

"I'm not sure if that's possible. Uhhh... O doll of iron, be born and serve me—{Stone Pyre} {Create Golem}?!"

The two spells activated at once. But they didn't end with me creating a Golem like Rokuko intended. Instead, the spells just mixed together and turned into nonsense.

"Er, hey, whoa!"

The sphere of mana with nowhere to go swirled above my palm... *Wait, I know this.* It's mana that's lost control, just like {Element Burst}.

I tossed the mana sphere to a nearby boulder, and upon impact it exploded with a blast of sound and fury. Parts of the boulder turned to metal as it collapsed into itself, like it had been gripped by a giant, invisible Midas hand.

"Oops, the mana lost control. Though this does seem like it could be a useful attack..." Rokuko mused.

"Nah. {Element Burst} is way easier to use."

"Mm. In that case, maybe we should just focus on improving {Element Burst}?"

"Not really sure that's a spell I should just be casually shooting at people..."

Rokuko clapped her hands. "Okay then. Let's turn it into a spell that you *can* casually shoot at people."

Oh. That idea didn't even occur to me.

And so, under Rokuko's supervision, I improved {Element Burst}. It only took a few minutes since I had cast the spell so many times before.

“{Element Shot}!” I chanted, and a pea-sized hole opened up within the boulder. Such was the result of significantly narrowing {Element Burst}’s area of effect by forcing myself to mentally envision it as a small beam. Containing the spell like that actually cost more mana, which allowed me to base the power of the beam partially on how much mana I used to contain it. Though doing so ultimately made the mana cost of the spell increase a bit. It was all minor, though. The spells were basically the same in power and cost.

“Dunno if I can really call this much of an improvement...”

“But now whoever you hit with it won’t die unless you hit them in a bad spot.”

The hole would probably cause some blood loss, but thankfully this was a world with Restoration magic. It wouldn’t cause any major problems. Being hit in certain places would cause instant death, but well, there was no way around that. We did the best we could here.

“I think {Element Flash} will be better here. Hurry up and learn how to use it.”

“I mean, I understand the theory, but it’s hard to think that abstractly. Right now it’ll just get me and everyone around me killed.”

{Element Flash} was an area of effect spell that would basically shoot out {Element Bursts} in every direction around me. Rokuko thought that one up too. But naturally, I would be caught up in the explosion, so she suggested I shoot a protective layer of {Element Burst} at the same time, but well... On a fundamental level, {Element Burst} was the result of rampaging mana, so it couldn’t be controlled like that. *Thin* layers were hard to make, so at the moment I just wasn’t able to turn Rokuko’s theory into a reality.

In short, {Element Flash} at the moment was just a massive explosion that took out me and everyone around me. It was insane.

Anyway, after some practice, I managed to make a singular wall of the explosion shooting away from me. All I would have to do next was form five of them: one above me, and four in every cardinal direction around me. I could skip one below me since that was the ground.

...Though, thinking about it, maybe I could just call the singular wall {Element

Flash}. If I launched it by surprise, it should be able to hit him.

“I think that should do it for today. If you don’t get to sleep soon, you may not heal up before lunch,” Rokuko said while attaching herself to my arm. *Soft.*

...What? We’re letting it too loose because we’re in the middle of a vacation? Yeah, Haku’s probably going to murder me when we get back.

“Er. Are we really doing this?”

“Of course. Keima, we’re sleeping together again.”

“Uh, phrasing. Please.”

I used {Stone Pyre}, then {Create Golem} to make a smooth rock. Rokuko spread out a futon on top of it.

...She phrased it poorly just then, but we’re not going to do anything lewd here. We’re just setting it up so I can use {Stone Pyre} to make more orichalcum dust before passing out.

It was training to increase my mana capacity, or rather, the speed of my mana regeneration. One’s regeneration sped up by exhausting your mana and then recovering it back up to full. This was common knowledge even in the empire, but some Demon Realm documents had more details, and Rokuko was determined to experiment.

“Not sure about sleeping outside the city like this, where there might be monsters roaming about.”

“We’ll be using the Divine Quilt, so it’s fine.”

The Divine Quilt... One wrapped in it could sleep without any fear of monsters, for it had absolute defense built into it. Truly, Father was a fearsome individual.

“Come here, Keima.”

“.....”

Rokuko sat on the futon and wrapped the Divine Quilt around her like a poncho before spreading out both arms my way. This was the only way for both of us to use it together. I didn’t want Rokuko attacked by monsters while I was

asleep, so we had no choice but to get in bed and sleep close together. There was nothing lewd about it at all. Nothing sexual. And yet...

“It’s fine, Keima. This isn’t any dungeon’s territory. It’s just you and me here.”

“Neruneh and Wataru aren’t that far away.”

“Just set the alarm clock and everything will work out.”

In the end I buckled beneath Rokuko’s invitation, and ended up in the futon with the quilt-wrapped Rokuko hugging me tight. Thanks to the Divine Quilt’s powers I was overcome by an immense sense of comfort and safety. It was such a comfortable quilt that it would feel nice and warm even within blazing hot magma. Not to mention that it came with Rokuko.

I set my Divine Alarm Clock to wake us up a bit before Wataru and Neruneh returned, then prepared to pass out. *Let’s get this over with. Go, {Stone Pyre} {Orichalcum Dust}! Guh.*

* * *

While we were doing that, my second week as Core 50’s slave came to an end. Each day was enriching and unique, with me getting swarmed at the human farms, mass-producing Dai-Frames in the magic tool workshop, making fried food udon, and training with the high-rank slaves. Working hard each day meant I slept well at night, which led to perhaps the most healthy lifestyle I had ever had.

Thus came my third duel with Core 50... However.

“Now, Keima. It seems to me that you have devised no strategy whatsoever to counter my Mind’s Eye.”

Yeah, I’m gonna sit this one out. After all, any strategy that can counter one’s mind being read isn’t something to be used lightly.

“I see. That is a shame. The pup has been growing steadily, and I had hoped to see the same with you.”

And in the first place, just asking me for my strategy is kind of spoiling yourself on it.

“Hm. That’s true as well. Even I would find it uninteresting to be told a

strategy outside of battle.”

It was pretty convenient for me that we could have a conversation without me having to open my mouth at all, but this still meant everything I thought was basically leaked info. There’s no point in even trying to think up a plan when Core 50’s around.

“...Would you think of one if I were not near you?”

I might think of one if you were to give me a whole week of free time. It would be even better if you gave me more specific details on that Mind’s Eye of yours, I thought in response. Core 50 put a hand on his chin in thought.

“Hmm. Very well. Though, I can only tell you what I myself know.”

Wait, you don’t mind?

“I always wish to surpass myself. Tell no others, understand? Though I will permit you to tell your battle partners. And I shall charge a price. Be aware that your work this week will cover your next week of free time and no more.”

Hmmm. A payment for Core 50... Nothing’s coming to mind. Is there even anything I have that he would want? I guess there’s the orichalcum sword that Father gave me. I brought it with me thinking I might be able to trade it for the Divine Pajamas, but... I don’t really want to give it up here. It’s way too valuable to trade for information.

“Ah?! What did you just say?!”

Oh crap. He really bit onto that. Anyway... Speaking through thoughts is getting kinda awkward. I’ll start using my mouth again.

“The God of Darkness... or rather, Father gave me a sword made entirely out of orichalcum.”

“Truly...?! I am beyond envious... I-If you show me the blade, I will accept the sight of it as payment for the information.”

“Just showing it to you? Sure, alright.” I took out the orichalcum blade from {Storage}. It continued to weigh almost nothing despite its size.

“Oooh! A blade made by Father himself...!”

“Feel free to hold it.”

“You have my gratitude!”

I held out the blade, and Core 50 practically leapt over to pick it up with visible glee. He gripped it in both hands and shook it gently through the air, getting a feel for how it was to use.

“...Hey, just saying, I wouldn’t mind trading that sword for the Divine Pajamas.”

“Truly?!” Core 50 exclaimed, jumping at the idea far more eagerly than I expected. “Ngh, but... I... but... Ngggh!”

“If I’m being honest, weapons can only show their true worth when wielded by a skilled warrior. I’m sure the sword would be happier with you wielding it. The sword Father made, in your arms, showing its true potential... Sounds good to me.”

“...You believe so?”

I could tell that just a slight push was making his heart tremble. *Feels like he’s just one push away. And if I’m being honest, it is true that the orichalcum sword would be happier with Core 50 than me. Excluding its missing parts.*

“...Keima. What was that just now?”

“Er, uh, well...”

Oh crap. He read my mind. He’s going to notice that I shaved off part of the hilt, I thought, and by then it was too late. Core 50 snapped to his senses and looked at the hilt.

“Tch! You shaved metal off a blade given to you by Father?! What illness of spirit are you stricken with?!”

“Er, I mean, he gave it to me since I asked for some nice materials to use in the first place, so...”

Core 50 was so shocked that the jaw of his helmet literally fell to the floor. He picked it up and fit it back into place.

“I-I must protect Father’s blade...!”

Ah. This is probably bad.

Core 50 stroked his reattached chin and looked at me head-on. “Keima! I shall wager the Divine Pajamas on this sword! I cannot allow you to harm Father’s blade any further! And not only that, but I will have you return all the pieces of orichalcum you removed from it!”

Weeelp. This sure got real bad, real fast.

Chapter 3

“This duel shall be your final opportunity to obtain the Divine Pajamas! Now, accept it!”

Well, at this rate, I was about to be forced into a duel I couldn't win.

“Er... I don't have the orichalcum I took from it on hand.”

“You may send it at a later date! Now, accept the duel immediately. This is an order!”

Ngh. Given that I'm a slave right now, I can't refuse a direct order like that. I'm just gonna have to play dirty here and try to claw for any advantage I can get.

“Understood. I understand that you want to forcibly take the sword Father gave me to make it yours. You want to steal the gift Father made for me, without Father's permission. I thought you were an honest, respectable person with morals, one who could look up to Father with your chest held out high, but oh well. What a shame,” I said. My repeated use of the word Father sent Core 50 faltering. The past few weeks I spent with Core 50 had made it more than clear that he genuinely was an honest and respectable person, so yeah.

“Th-That is not what I am doing in the least! I am simply demanding you wager it on a duel!”

“Wasn't it just a second ago that I asked for more time since I had no chance of beating you, a condition which you agreed to?”

“O-Of course, our duel will take place one week from now! You may spend that time preparing to defeat me!”

“To defeat you, huh? Don't you mean land a single blow on you? That's what the condition has been up until now. I don't think I can beat you otherwise.”

“...Three blows. You will win if you land three blows on me. A week should be enough to accomplish at least that.”

Ngh, that's not gonna be easy... Curse you, Core 50. You're going all-out to

win this.

“Can I bring more allies, then? Wataru the Hero is still hanging around, so.”

“I do not mind. Come at with me with all you have. I shall neither flee nor hide.”

Oh, nice. My chances to win just shot right up.

“It would be best for us to be separated until then. Therefore, I will spend the next week waiting at the bottom of my dungeon. Come at me with all you have when the week is up.”

Wait, didn't he just say he wouldn't run or hide...?

“I shall inform you where my dungeon is. It is a place that anybody can enter. It is neither running nor hiding. You need only ask my maid for information.”

Apparently it was normal in Demon Realm culture to boldly await a duel within the depths of one's dungeon. It genuinely wasn't considered running or hiding. *I guess that's more of a Dungeon Core thing that bled into Demon Realm culture.*

“Now then, Keima. That should be enough. Accept the duel,” Core 50 said, and my slave collar tightened a bit. Seemed like I wouldn't be able to push him any further than I already had.

“...Alright. I'll do everything I can to win, then.”

“Excellent. Until we meet again.”

Thus began my battle with Core 50.

* * *

First up was asking the elf maid about Core 50's Mind's Eye. That was a guaranteed payment for me showing him the orichalcum sword. She gave me a booklet filled with information about Core 50, at which point I went with Rokuko to where Aidy and her Master were training Niku. Rokuko coming with me meant Wataru and Neruneh were also there.

“So yeah, Rokuko. We need to beat Lord 50's Mind's Eye.”

“Yup! So, give it to me straight. Do you think it's possible?”

At the moment, we were at an extreme disadvantage. It was fair to say that ninety percent of every battle was determined by how well you prepared, and we had basically zero preparations here.

“You’re gonna be helping out here, Wataru.”

“Wait, me? What?”

“This isn’t going to be a one-on-one fight.”

Indeed. My duel with Core 50 had begun with Niku and I teaming up against him—it was never a one-on-one fight, and he had just given me permission to bring more allies. It was a one-on-many fight.

“Keima, I get that you guys can understand each other without words, but you’re going to have to actually explain things to me. We’re not married, so I don’t understand you on the same level that Rokuko does,” Wataru said. Rokuko blushed at the word ‘married.’

“We’re not married. Put simply, I negotiated with Lord 50 to get the Divine Pajamas through a duel, and he agreed that it would be my win if I could hit him three times. Very Demon Realm-esque, no?”

“Okay, now I understand.” Wataru nodded, then looked at Niku. She had been fighting for so long already that she was out of energy and breathing hard.

“Out of breath already, hm?” Aidy observed.

“I’m still... a human, so...” Niku said in between pants.

“Breathing creates openings. Didn’t I tell you to stop breathing during our fights?”

“That isn’t normally possible...”

“Oh, but ‘normal’ is such a boring concept. I would recommend you toss it out the window entirely.”

Whoa, whoa, whoa, she’s not a Dungeon Core. Pretty sure her tossing breathing out the window would be pretty bad. It’s not even something you can toss out the window. Or maybe you would have to be as strong as a Hero and have the sheer resolve to abandon fundamental parts of human life, like breathing? Yeah, I think I’m just gonna stay as a human.

“I’m not sure I can hold my breath very long.”

“If you can manage to hold it for a long time, then you will be stronger than those who can’t.”

“I see... that’s logical.”

Niku lunged to slice at Aidy’s legs, but Aidy stepped on her knife to block the blow.

“Attacking the legs is a good idea, but not a perfect one.”

“Ngh...!”

“And... ah, you dodged it. Good, very good. I dislike your lack of attachment for your weapon, but your decision served you well.”

Aidy moved to kick Niku while still stepping on her knife, but Niku dodged it by abandoning her weapon. It was a nice snap decision.

Anyway, that was when I decided to speak up. “Aidy, how’s Niku coming along?”

“She has learned just a bit of Detachment. Sebas, continue training her for me. I shall have tea with Rokuko.”

“As you wish, milady... C’mon, dog. Get up already.”

Sebas took Aidy’s place in front of Niku. Niku took a deep breath, then forced her exhausted body up. For a second I thought about casting Restoration magic on her, but this was partially intended to get her used to extremely stressful situations, so I couldn’t let myself ruin it for her.

“...Pretty intense stuff. I’m impressed that Kuro can keep up with it. My spirit would already be broken. In fact, my spirit was broken two or three times when I was training with Misha.”

“The pup wished for it herself, so that she may learn Demon King style for her Master’s sake. Her motivation is so foolish I decided to truly grind her into dust. But do not worry. I will break no toy of Rokuko’s,” Aidy said with a joyous giggle. Despite the fact she had just been dueling, she wasn’t sweaty in the least, which made sense given that not breathing was a prerequisite for becoming an assistant instructor in Demon King style.

“Demon King style really is inhuman, isn’t it?” Wataru mused.

“It *is* a style for demons, you know. Humans aren’t supposed to be capable of learning it at all.”

“Huh? But aren’t you a human, Aidy?”

“No, I am a demon. I rule a duchy here, remember?”

Wataru and Aidy were having a lively conversation. Even she had taken a liking to him, since he was strong and this was the Demon Realm, of course.

I opened up the booklet. “Alright, Rokuko. This is the information I got on Lord 50.”

“I investigated him a bit myself, but let’s see here...”

The booklet consisted of several, well-organized bullet points:

- In general, he can only read up to one person’s mind at a time. When attempting to read more than one, he can’t tell whose thoughts are whose.
- Can’t read the minds of those without thoughts (Golems, etc).
- The mind-reading can continue forever. Experiments have shown it can continue for over a year straight.
- He doesn’t need a direct line of sight in order to read minds (for example, wearing a full suit of armor to hide your body won’t work). Furthermore, he can sense malice.
- It works even from several hundred meters away.
- He can’t read one’s subconscious.

“I fought Lord 50 myself back in the Hell Tournament, but I didn’t know he could read minds. Thinking back, that explains a lot.”

“Oh my. Just so you know, Lord 50 is infamous for his Mind’s Eye, though Sebas and I would have lost even if he hadn’t used it.”

Wataru and Aidy came in to join our conversation. Both of them had experience fighting Core 50 at the Hell Tournament.

“Anyway,” I began, “We can read between the lines of this memo and figure out that Lord 50 can choose which mind he’s reading at any given moment. Not

that knowing that changes a whole lot.”

He could read one person’s mind at a time, and he could do so even when they were hidden behind obstructions. That meant he could read people’s minds outside of a room even when the door was shut. Put all that together, and he could decide which mind he wanted to read.

“Woow, figuring that out from the memo was pretty smaaaart,” Neruneh said while peering at it herself.

“I doubt he was hiding it anyway.” But if we outright asked him about this, we ran the risk of leaking our plans, so it would be best to just put our heads together and extrapolate.

“That makes it clear what strategy is the best, anyway. Right, Keima?” Rokuko nudged.

“Yeah. Surrounding him in a group will definitely help mitigate his mind reading. No getting around the fact he can only read one mind at once.” Though the fact Core 50 went out of his way to write his weakness down meant he could see that kind of strategy coming a mile away.

“Shouldn’t we invite Aidy to fight him too, then?”

“Oh my. We don’t fight for free in the Demon Realm, Rokuko,” Aidy said with a giggle.

“How about a duel with Wataru?”

“Um.”

“Very well. We have already fought many times, but that is an acceptable offer nonetheless.”

“Er, wait, wait.”

Sorry, Wataru, but you’re Rokuko’s slave right now and you have no choice in the matter. Which means Aidy and Sebas will be helping us out here.

“...Hm. Keima, I think I just came up with a pretty good idea.”

“Hm?”

“We can just use your specialty, Keima—surround him and beat him up,”

Rokuko said with an evil grin. “We can hire mercenaries for this, too. Keima, this realm... no, even this city is filled with strong fighters. If he can’t read all of their minds, we can count on a flood of people to get in a couple of hits.”

“Yeah, that makes sense. I’m just gonna check with the maid first so he doesn’t end up complaining about that.”

I went to see the elf maid, who was remaining in Core 50’s estate as a means of contacting him.

“Mercenaries?”

“Yeah. He said I could bring a bunch of allies, but I figured I should check and make sure that mercenaries are okay too.”

“Wait just a moment.”

It seemed the maid had some way of contacting Core 50 at any moment. She closed her eyes and froze in place. *I wonder if she’s just a dungeon monster disguised as an elf? That would explain why she can contact him directly. Or maybe even normal people can be treated as dungeon monsters somehow.*

After a pause, the elf maid opened her eyes, presumably having gotten a response from Core 50. “He says that he does not mind, and that you may even hire his own slaves. It would surely be easier to coordinate with the high-rank slaves you have trained with. However, be prepared to pay the proper cost for hiring the mercenaries. Here in the Demon Realm, their prices are determined by law.”

...I see. So I can bring as many allies as I like, as long as I can pay for them.

“So, Keima? How many should we bring?” Rokuko asked.

“Hmm... money, huh? Hey, Aidy. What’s the market price of mercenaries?”

“It depends on their Hunter Rank and strength. Prices can range from silvers to golds. In a fight with Lord 50, I would suggest hiring mercenaries that charge fifty golds.”

Fifty golds for one fight was about the price of the highest quality mercenaries. Hm. Fifty golds each. If we considered how much money our inn had made, I could hire dozens of them, but I only had 100 golds in my {Wallet}.

That meant we could only hire two of them.

“Another strat would be to buy a bunch of cheaper ones instead, but... Hmm.”

“Why not make the money now? You could earn hundreds of golds no problem at all, Keima.”

“Nah, nah, nah. Maybe I could if there were a bunch of gullible rich people like Wataru around, but I doubt that.”

“You’re really going to treat me like a gullible rich person? Sure, fine, okay.”

In the end, just how many allies would we be able to gather? Only time would tell.

“We should probably think of strategies other than bringing a lot of allies,” Rokuko mused.

“Yeah.” It would be a problem if we just bought a bunch of mercenaries and they ultimately weren’t good enough to get the job done. The more strategies and backup plans we had, the better. We would just have to think up as many plans as we could and iron out the best ones.

...One week. It was a lot of time to prepare, but also, not a lot of time at all. *Maybe I should have tried negotiating for one extra week.*

Core 50’s Perspective

And so a week passed. Core 50 had no contact with Keima’s group outside of the question the elf maid asked, and so he had no idea what plans they might have concocted. But to be honest, the moment the question about mercenaries came, Core 50 felt a tad disappointed. He couldn’t count how many times that strategy had been used against him. It was true that large groups could nullify his Mind’s Eye to some extent, but he was more than well aware of that already. Either way, he quickly shook off his disappointment, since he knew Keima well enough to guess he would have more than just one plan.

Core 50 shut out all information from the outside world, allowing contact only from the elf maid for questions. If he accidentally heard their strategy for

beating his Mind's Eye, he would subconsciously start thinking up a counter-strategy. That wasn't what he wanted, even if it *was* a duel for an orichalcum blade made by Father. However... Keima hadn't contacted him a single time since that first day.

Core 50 had so much time to kill that he just spent the days doing basic training exercises. Along the way he thought up a new ultimate technique, discovered an obscure flaw in his Mind's Eye, and devised potential strategies he might theoretically use against himself. In the end, the two best strategies were the same as always—either use such overwhelming force that one's mind being read didn't matter, or don't let one's mind be read in the first place. One strategy was to think up such a terrifying thing that the mind reader would be intimidated, but outside of Core 4 (who now named themselves Chaos), he had never met anyone with a spirit horrible enough to terrify him. That would likely be irrelevant, given that it was difficult to imagine Keima being on good terms with Chaos, or having the means to acquire their help.

And so, after some pondering on the past, it was finally time for the battle to begin. Core 50 had kept the entrance to his dungeon closed for the past week. There were no invaders inside. Nobody would be intruding on the battle.

Just to be safe, he turned off all the insta-death traps in his dungeons, as well as the mazes. He would be waiting at the bottom floor's Boss Room with no measures to waste Keima's time. He wished to fight with both of them at their maximum potential.

“Now then! Come forth and face... face me?!” As soon as the dungeon opened, he sensed a huge flood of people push forward. “Wh-Wh-What is going on?!” Core 50 faltered, and opened the map he had boldly been choosing not to check before. His dungeon was surrounded by people, people, and yet more people. There were both green and red dots, the former most likely being residents of the Demon Realm. He opened his monitor and checked the entrance of his dungeon—and saw the unthinkable. Several hundred people were gathered in front of his dungeon. There were citizens and Core 50's own slaves. And on top of that, there were some true powerhouses, the likes of which would dominate in the Fighter's Tournament and the Hell Tournament.

“I said that he could bring allies... but is this not far too many?!” Core 50

exclaimed. Naturally, not even he had expected Keima to bring this many fighters.

Keima's Perspective

The crowd of people in front of Core 50's dungeon was so vast there were bodies as far as the eye could see. Since this was the Demon Realm, a lot of them were pretty monstrous in appearance. There were so many hundreds of people that one might initially think that the entire city had come with us. The fact that some had opened up stands and started selling food on top of weapons was very Demon Realm-esque.

"I have to say, I'm... impressed that you managed to gather this many people," the elf maid said with an exasperated sigh.

"Sometimes, you gamble and win. I'm as surprised as you are."

"...I wondered what havoc you had wrought when you asked me for my assistance in controlling your allies, but it did not take me long to find an answer."

There were so many people that my party alone wouldn't be enough to direct them. Thus, not minding at all if Core 50 were to learn of this, we casually had the elf maid help out.

As soon as the dungeon's entrance opened, our army of allies eagerly began pouring inside. Indeed, this ocean of people were all our allies in the fight against Core 50. How had we gathered this many allies? It all started one week ago, when preparations for the duel began.

One Week Ago

Alright. I want to recruit some allies over the next week to help fight Core 50, but with the money I have on hand, it'll be all I can do just to hire a couple of skilled mercenaries. What's the solution to this puzzle?

Rokuko was the first to come up with a solution. "Keima, you're paying for Aidy's participation by offering a duel with Wataru, right? Maybe there are

others who will join our fight for the opportunity to duel Wataru.”

Good point. Considering how much debt I relieved Wataru from, it would probably be fair to work him that hard.

“Excellent idea,” Aidy said. “That would be fair payment for both friends and mercenaries. I believe that many will be willing to join us for that payment exactly. Shall I name those who come to mind for me?”

“Hold on, hold on,” Wataru interjected. “My body won’t last if I have to keep fighting people as strong as Aidy back-to-back. Like, it physically just isn’t happening.”

Aidy was fond of the idea, but Wataru was exceptionally not fond of it.

“Maybe we can have Niku heeelp? As iin, only those who defeat Niku get to challenge Wataruuu?”

“...I’ll do my best.”

Neruneh had a suggestion, and Niku was into it. But that would just lead to Niku getting overwhelmed instead of Wataru. That wouldn’t be good. *Only in the Demon Realm would people agree to help in a fight just to get the opportunity to fight more, but that would break down if the reward ends up too exhausted to fight... Oh!*

“...Keima. Did you think of something just now? That’s some smile on your face.”

“Yeah, it’s um... Kind of an evil smile, if I’m being honest.”

Rokuko smiled, and Wataru forced an uncomfortable grin. I had thought up a very good idea indeed. It was just what we needed to get a huge load of allies.

And in order to execute that good idea, we went to the city market. There were a lot of people there, which was just what I needed.

“You’re going to recruit the mercenaries here, Keima?”

“Nah. I’m gonna gather allies.” I used {Stone Pyre} at my feet and shot myself up on a short pillar, creating a stand for me to speak upon, then clapped to gather further attention.

“Listen up, fellas! One hell of a chance has just landed on your laps! How many people want an opportunity to fight the one and only Lord 50 himself?!” Instantly, I felt all eyes on me. “I’m Keima, temporarily serving as one of Lord 50’s special-rank slaves! Due to some special circumstances, Lord 50 is holding a massive fighting event! Listen up, everyone! I’m talking about Lord 50 here!” I repeatedly said Lord 50 in order to draw more attention. “Lord 50 gave me a challenge. ‘Land three blows upon me if you can,’ he said! Do you understand, everyone? Lord 50 desires battle! And he is asking for me to arrange a battle in which he gets hit three times!” That wasn’t a lie. Core 50 had told me to land three blows on him. And to finish things off... “This is a battle festival! The participation fee is a mere copper! For just one copper, you can all fight Lord 50 with me as companions!”

I had been given permission to bring allies, and he hadn’t given any maximum to how many I could bring. In other words, it would be safe for me to bring along everyone in the entire city as my ally. Their payment? Quite simply, the right to fight a legendary warrior like Lord 50. There was no doubting that the battle-hungry Demon Realm residents would come flocking to the opportunity. We were talking about a fight with the champion of the Hell Tournament, after all. They would pay money for it.

“I know that there are no cowards in this city, no, in the entire Demon Realm that would run from this opportunity!” I yelled. It was an event where everyone could participate, which basically made it a festival. I embraced that and just went ahead recruiting allies in as large-scale of a way as I could.

“R-Really? A fight with Lord 50?!”

“We can really fight him...? It’ll cost just one copper?!” asked a harpy with wings for arms. I had the perfect answer for him.

“Yup! But whatever you do, don’t forget the one copper! The time and place is one week from now, in front of the local dungeon! The entry fee is one copper! This is your big chance to fight Lord 50 for just a copper!”

I could have charged a silver, but the fight would end as soon as three blows were landed on him. It would be easier for people to accept the fight ending before they got there if they only had to pay a single copper.

“This festival is first come, first served! The battle will end as soon as three hits are landed upon Lord 50! Allow me to repeat myself. Lord 50 is challenging us to land three hits upon him in total! In other words, only three will have the honor of landing a blow upon Lord 50! Those who arrive first will have an advantage! And of course, a single person can potentially land all three blows! If they can, that is! Hah!” I let out a simple taunt, and the Demon Realm folk got fired up, roaring that they could, in fact, do that. That was literal phrasing, by the way. I saw some Fire Elementals literally shooting out flames. That’s the Demon Realm for you.

“If you know anyone who would want to join in, go tell them all about this! One week from now, in front of the local dungeon! Entry fee of just one copper! Lord 50 will be waiting for us at the bottom of the dungeon!” I repeated the time, date, and entry fee one more time, then drew the announcement to a close. A roar of excitement ripped through the crowd. I looked around and saw people talking among themselves, running off to tell those who weren’t present, and even starting to duel because they were already that pumped up. If I made the same announcement at a few other places, I could count on a ton of people coming to participate.

After having Wataru break the pillar, I moved on to the next place.

“To think you’d pay them with the work you want them doing...” Wataru said.

“Pretty simple once you think about it, huh? It only works since this is the Demon Realm, where getting to fight someone strong is payment in and of itself.”

Yup. The problem was the payment getting overwhelming, so we just needed to make it someone we didn’t mind getting overwhelmed!

“But why add the copper onto that...?”

“Think about it for a second, Wataru. Them paying me a copper will be inarguable proof that they and I are allies, yeah?”

“Oh. Right, good point.”

A verbal agreement without any record might cause all sorts of problems in the future, but setting up a receptionist by the dungeon entrance and charging

one copper from everyone going through will be instant proof that they paid to be my ally.

“They’re happy to fight Lord 50 for a single copper, and I’m happy to have them fighting for me. Everybody’s benefiting here. It feels good, not gonna lie.”

“Aha. Truly a win-win solution.”

And so, in a similar way, we went and recruited people from Core 50’s training grounds and human farms. I mean, we were just hiring mercenaries as promised. The only difference was that they were paying us instead of the other way around!

“Oof, that’s evil. But that’s the Keima I know. Feels kinda relieving, honestly,” Wataru said, seeming genuinely relieved.

...What, you want me to name this the ‘Fight Lord 50 With Wataru Festival’, bub? Huh? Didn’t think so.

...Flashback, over.

So yeah. This ocean of bodies was the result of us recruiting a ton of people from training grounds and human farms on top of people in the city. I hadn’t ordered any of them to set up stands, either. Merchants just followed people, as they were wont to do.

Niku, Neruneh, Wataru, the elf maid, and I were at the dungeon entrance taking care of the payments. Aidy and Sebas were leisurely waiting their turn, and I had Rokuko taking care of another job.

“Now now, one copper, one copper to go inside! We’re all allies here! Go forth and challenge Lord 50! Gogogogo!”

I emphasized that we were allies once they paid the money, then sent them into the dungeon. They all raced inside, murder and eager bloodlust in their eyes. *Man, it sure is nice to have allies!*

“Ah, there’s the payment desk! C’mon, Sukjira! Hurry! We’re already way too friggin’ late!”

“We just gotta put a copper in, right? Let’s go, Shironaga! You too, Uzou and Muzou! Don’t fall behind!”

“Okaaaay, everyone who wants to join Lord 50’s festivaal, please put one copper heeeere.”

Neruneh was holding open a sack, which the participants tossed their coin into before heading into the dungeon.

“Keima, we’re joining in too! Let’s go, Muzou! Hurry!”

“Yup! Gah, Shironaga and Sukjira raced ahead again! We gotta catch up, Uzou!”

Oh, there go Uzou and Muzou. Seems like they were with a Werewolf and a Weretiger. Both were about 75% furry, meaning they were covered in fur and had the heads of a wolf and tiger. The Werewolf had a muscular torso with wolf-like legs, while the Weretiger had a macho body like a pro wrestler.

In the Demon Realm, monsters didn’t have to hide the fact they’re monsters, and they just lived normally with humans. In the empire there were Warcats who had to claim they were just cat beastkins (e.g. Misha), but it seemed the Demon Realm was more considerate toward minorities. *Demon Culture says anyone strong is welcome, but from a dungeon perspective, monsters give less DP. You don’t actually want them dominating too much of the population, really.*

“Heya, Keima. You called?”

“Hm? Oh, Ostle. Aknera. And everyone else, too. Heya.”

All the high-rank slaves from Core 50’s training grounds came walking over.

“Here, the coppers. We can join the fight now, yeah?”

“Yup. As far as the record’s concerned, we personally negotiated a price and you paid to join the fight. All good?”

“For sure, for sure. Man, I can’t believe I get the chance to fight Lord 50 himself! This is the best. Special-rank slaves sure are something else. Not many would be nice enough to share this sweet-ass deal.”

“What can I say? It’s all thanks to Lord 50 agreeing to let me fight with allies.”

With Ostle at the lead, the high-rank slaves tossed over coppers and charged into the dungeon. Hopefully they could land one or two hits between them.

On the one hand, there were so many people it felt inevitable that they would be able to land three hits, but at the same time, it felt like human wave tactics would never work, no matter how many people I gathered. Core 50 was up there at the very top of the Demon Realm in terms of strength, which meant he was basically one of the strongest warriors in the entire world, so... Yeah. I would be waiting with my party for the opportune moment to jump in. I had a few more tricks up my sleeve on top of all this.

Core 50's Perspective

"There he is! Lord 50, prepare yourseeelf!"

The first to get through the dungeon and reach Core 50 was none other than the high rank slaves that had trained with Keima. They had experience delving through this dungeon as part of their training, so they conquered it with relative ease. Despite failing to reach it ahead of the crowd, they used the shortcuts they knew to reach the bottom faster than anyone.

"Ngh! Do none of you realize that you have been fooled?!"

"Fooled? Wait, what? Keima told us that we could fight you if we joined him as allies. Was that wrong? Did he lie to us?"

"Er, no, that's entirely true, actually..."

"Then there's nothing wrong with this at all! Hyaaaah!"

"I-It's true that there's nothing wrong, but still! Do you take no issue with this?!"

To say that they had been fooled was slightly inaccurate. It was more that they had been manipulated, but either way, the high-rank slaves weren't especially happy with the fact that only specially chosen slaves got to fight Core 50. They had always been burning with the desire to fight him themselves, and all Keima did was give them justification to do just that.

They wanted to fight Core 50 if the opportunity arose. The opportunity did arise. Thus, they fight. It was that simple.

"Hmph! Such puny attacks will never land on me!"

“Hah, that’s Lord 50 for you! Everyone, pile on him at once!”

“RIGHT!” the other slaves all roared. Core 50’s slaves unleashed the cooperative power they had learned while training on his grounds. But even so, that wasn’t enough to land a blow. Ostle’s Lamia tail was grabbed and used to toss him, while all six of Aknera’s arms were blocked by a single one of his. He blocked the long-range attacks by snatching slaves and using them as shields, swiping away the blasts and throwing them to block the rest.

“Bwahaha! Not bad, you all! Consider me entertained!”

“Hah! Lord 50’s as strong as ever! But we’re not finished yet!”

“Very well. I approve of the resolve to sacrifice yourself to obtain a tie, but do you think that will be enough?” Core 50 asked, having read Ostle’s mind. There were about a dozen surprise attacks running through Ostle’s head, and his companions moved in such a way to only allow a few of them to happen. Core 50 saw all.

Thus, he dodged to a safe location, and... slam! A shudder ran through his armor. He looked down and saw a fist pressed against his torso.

“Hrm?!”

“It landed... it really landed! Hahahaha!”

Aknera rejoiced as blood streamed down her cracked fist. The blow had done no damage whatsoever, but nonetheless, it was a hit that landed—a hit that had landed fairly. However, Core 50 had predicted that no attack whatsoever would occur—he quickly used his Mind’s Eye to determine the source of the error.

It all came down to Keima’s advice.

“After obtaining peak cooperation, boldly lower the effectiveness of your attack... I see.”

Lord 50’s so perfect, it’s actually better to go for an imperfect attack if you think about it. He can read the optimal move, so go for the suboptimal move he doesn’t expect, Keima had suggested. High rank slaves didn’t need to use Demon King style Detachment to launch attacks that couldn’t be predicted.

Indeed, a beginner's body did not move as they wished. The attack she launched relied on that degree of inexperience. Normally, it wouldn't have hit due to being an inexperienced move—hence it was unexpected, and it hit Core 50.

However, just like it was difficult for an adult to create the art style of a toddler with crayons and determination, it was difficult for an experienced fighter to recreate the clumsy blow of a beginner. This was because the fundamentals of movement were so beaten into their body as to be subconscious.

“You... you sliced off your own arm to force yourself into clumsiness!”

“That's right! I have six arms, and I cut off one to make this attack work!”

She had spent her life training her body, and on the incredibly slim hope of landing a single blow on Core 50, she had readily sliced off one of her arms. Keima's initial suggestion had been damaging the hilt of a blade or adding random amounts of wrist weights, but Aknera knew that being so half-baked wouldn't be enough to work on Core 50. She took the much bolder route, and her courage had narrowly secured success.

“Incredible! You have earned my praise!” Core 50 roared approvingly before grabbing Aknera's throat and throwing her hard against a nearby wall. The force of the impact pushed the air out of her lungs and she fell to the ground unconscious. But her expression was one of satisfaction. Core 50's merciless throw was a sign of his respect toward her successfully landing a blow on him.

That said, once the trick was exposed, it would no longer work. The hit landed precisely because he had been attacked in an unexpected way while having little leeway due to the numbers. He would likely be able to predict and account for such a strategy next time.

And so, while the remaining high-rank slaves were giving their all to stay in the fight, the rest of the citizens arrived.

“Oooh! The fight's actually going down! Alright, let's join in!”

“Lord 50! It's dueling time!”

Countless sets of friendly yet murderous eyes fell onto Core 50. Several of

them belonged to fighters even stronger than the high-rank slaves that had arrived first. The slaves from the human farms were there, too. They weren't as strong as the others, necessarily, but the fights would be occurring back to back with no time to rest.

"Bwaha, ahahaha! Good, very good! Now things are getting interesting!"

And yet, despite it all, Core 50 was so excited that he couldn't help but roar in laughter.

Keima's Perspective

"Keima, one hit has landed."

"Whoa, really?"

The elf maid working at the dungeon entrance informed me that one of the high-rank slaves had successfully struck Core 50. It seemed that my advice had done the trick.

"Say what?! Someone's already landed a blow on Lord 50?!"

"Seriously...?! Is that even possible?! Oh shit, oh shit! Now I'm pumped!"

"The fight's gonna end if we keep wasting time here! Let's go!"

The gathered participants heard about that as well, and got even more fiercely motivated than before.

"Nice. Now we have a bit of leeway," I said. I had thought up several plans to win this, but in the end, we were gambling on whether enough of them would succeed for us to win. Three cheers for my slave brothers being ballsy enough to land a hit.

Rokuko came walking over. In her hands was a ball of paper. Looked like she had finished what I asked her to make.

"Keima, I finished the map of the shortest route."

"Sweet. Let's post it, then."

It was a map of the dungeon, drawn by hand—a bit differently from a Dungeon Battle map—so it was safe for normal people to see. The creation of

the map was the job I had given to Rokuko.

“Wait,” Wataru said. “That’s a map of *this* dungeon?”

“Yup. It’s an old dungeon, so there were documents all about its structure. We finally found the map today, but the place where it was kept wasn’t letting anybody borrow it, and they didn’t want it outside there. I’ve been having Rokuko make a copy of it all morning... Did I not mention that?”

“No, you didn’t! Oh, but that does explain why Rokuko hasn’t been at the desks. Aidy and Sebas were one thing, but Rokuko not being here was a bit confusing.”

Well, naturally, those were all excuses just for Wataru. Rokuko had been sticking close to Aidy, running rats through the dungeon and mapping it out. Aidy and Sebas hadn’t been handling payments since they were guarding Rokuko.

The exploration itself was being handled by the festival goers... or rather, my companions, so the rats just had to tag along with the crowd. *Man, it sure is nice having a lot of companions.*

I spread the map onto a board and placed it next to the desks. Now the participants could go straight to Core 50 without getting lost along the way. We would be using it ourselves as well.

“...Do you think it’s about time for me to go, too?”

“Nah, Wataru. You go after we land one more blow on him. You’re our trump card here, so I want to keep you up my sleeve for as long as I can.”

“That’s riiiiight. You need to stay up here and take care of visitors with meee, Wataruuu,” Neruneh said with a smile while wrapping her arms around his. Wataru gave a fairly pleased grin. *I’ve given you some strats for beating Core 50 too, Wataru. Don’t let me down here.*

That was when we heard the clanking of a heavy set of armored footsteps heading this way. Or rather, several sets of footsteps. I looked over. There was the Kobold from the magic tool workshop riding a Dai-Frame, being followed by a group of his coworkers wearing similar Dai-Frames. They weren’t all Kobolds—I saw ant people and Dwarves in the mix, forming in total a squad of six Dai-

Frames. It was an unusual sight, and the people of the Demon Realm stepped back a bit to clear a path for them.

“What in the world are those...?” Wataru muttered.

“They’re magic tools called Dai-Frames. They’re like rideable Golems.”

“Interesting... I’ve never seen one of those before. I wonder if they would make one for me...?”

Huh. Does Wataru like that sorta thing? Well, I guess no man alive doesn’t like robots and power suits and stuff.

Neruneh tapped Wataru’s shoulder. “Do you want me to make one for yooou? I learned how to make them at the workshoop.”

“Whoa, you can make them?! Yes, please!”

It’ll cost you, though. That’s a style of magic tool that doesn’t exist in the empire. Hope you’re ready to shell out the big bucks.

The Kobold at the front waved his hand, which in turn waved the Dai-Frame’s hand. “Heya, special-rank! We’re gonna join in too!”

The craftsmen were citizens of the Demon Realm as well. They all wanted to join in too. I asked if they could make some equipment I wanted to use against Core 50, and upon seeing the designs they all got pumped up on the spot at the prospect of landing a blow on Core 50 themselves. The plan was for us to use the equipment ourselves, but the more the merrier.

“So, how’d the building end up going?”

“Perfect! Gahaha!” the Kobold replied before showing me how the arms of the Dai-Frame were box-shaped and covered in metal. It seemed they had implemented the suggestions I had for dealing with Core 50.

“Now you guys just need to pay one copper to join the party, but, well, want me to just consider it done already?”

“Nah, nah, we’ll pay. This is the map, huh? Alright! Let’s get goin’!”

The Dai-Frames piloted by magic tool craftsmen clanked loudly as they entered the dungeon. Hopefully they could land at least one hit with all that.

Core 50's Perspective

There stood a stag beetle bugman warrior, standing on two massive legs supporting its muscular body and wielding excellent halberds (which was like an axe and spear combined into one). His head was exactly that of a stag beetle, but in the process of evolving to stand on two legs he must have acquired pliable neck muscles, as he was looking directly forward. He had four arms, two on each side, and all of them were wielding halberds. Each arm resembled a stag beetle's as well, the result being that he had a natural set of armor.

"Nguuh?!"

However, in the face of Core 50, the stag beetle wasn't any different from an untrained commoner. He grabbed the bugman and swung him around, halberds and all, as if to say his hard skin was perfect for using as a shield.

"N-Ngggh! I-I'm not finished yet...!" the bugman roared, dropping his halberds and pawing at his belt with all four hands. But what he expected to find there was simply gone.

"Looking for these, perhaps?"

"What?!"

The four knives the bugman had been searching for fell to the ground from Core 50's hands. All his options had been sealed, and with the shock adding onto the damage from being used as a shield, the bugman collapsed to the ground.

The next challenger immediately stepped in front of Core 50. This one was a human martial artist.

"Ultimate move, Exploding Dragon Fist! ...What?!"

"Hm. It could use some work."

The ultimate move involved filling one's gauntlets with mana and having it all explode on contact. But Core 50 saw right through that and grabbed the arm flung his way before tossing him over his shoulder, at which point he exploded upon contact with the wall.

"Hyaaah! Ngh, ngaaah?!"

“M-Muzou! I-I’ll avenge you, brother... Nghaaah?!”

Two human hunters were caught in the explosion. Their partners had been hit by the bugman when Core 50 was flinging him about, so their entire party was forced to retire.

“Sheesh. Those guys were as weak as I thought.”

“Think it’s about time for us to jump in?”

“Nah, I want to keep watching for a bit. Noble demons have moves as crazy as I expected. I’m learning a lot.”

There were some who watched Core 50 from afar, probing him for weak points. But their observation came with it the risk of getting wrapped up in the defeated challengers that Core 50 threw all over the place. Nobody wanted to undergo the humiliation of being defeated without even participating in battle.

“Then we’re gonna go up next!”

With a clang, a mysterious object stepped forth. Riding inside of it was a Kobold.

“Oh? So that’s the magic tool I was informed of. I believe it is called a Dai-Frame?”

“That’s right, Lord 50! They’re letting small guys like us fight like the biggest Weretigers in the world! Let’s do this thing!”

The Kobold and the other five Dai-Frames surrounded Core 50.

“Hm... I see, I see. There is a trap within your arms.”

“Ngh...! No hiding anything from you, huh? Alright, take this!” the Kobold yelled, rushing toward Core 50 and activating the trap on his arms alongside his allies. Instantly, large white clumps shot out of their arms. Core 50 dodged them. But the Dai-Frames just kept launching the white clumps onto the floor. A thick white cloud of what seemed like smoke rose off the ground.

“Hm? Is that not udon powder?”

“Bwahaha! Lord 50... ever heard of dust explosions?” the Kobold grinned, this time taking out a fire magic tool from a small metal box. Core 50 read his mind

on the spot, dashed to his side, and stole the magic tool.

Dust explosions were, as the name implied, the explosion caused when one filled the room with dusty powder and set them on fire. The explosions could end up large enough to blow up an entire room or house. Even the sparks of clinking metal could cause a blast like that.

The Kobold and his squad were attempting to cause one such explosion, prepared to be blown up with it. All they wanted was to land a single strike, and an explosion of that size would have to be accepted as landing a fair blow—if the explosion actually happened, that is.

“You all are my belongings, remember? Treat your bodies with more care,” Core 50 said.

“C-Curses! The opportunity of a lifetime, and I messed it up!”

Core 50 stopped the explosion before it could happen without any hesitation whatsoever. His magic tool craftsmen were valuable, and their exploding would be a loss for him.

...But that itself was the trap. The fire magic tool in Core 50’s hand began to shoot fire out of nowhere.

“What?!”

“Hrm?!”

Core 50 acted fast. He undid his cape, enveloped the fire magic tool in it, and tossed it outside the room. A few challengers were knocked unconscious from being hit by the cape, but that was fine. Core 50 sighed in relief, the explosion having been averted.

“Gaaah, almost!” came yelling from the nearby door. “We woulda won if the fire had hit Lord 50’s hands!”

“The fire shot out in the wrong direction! I told you we should’ve made it shoot from all directions at once!”

“We had our hands full making it activate from detecting any mana that didn’t belong to the boss, you know that!”

There was a noisy crowd by the door. Finding them suspicious, Core 50 read

their minds, and... Of course.

“Look over there,” he said.

“...Those are apprentices. What of them?”

“It seems they were the true fighters here. You were fooled by Keima.”

“What...?”

Dust explosions occurred when the air was filled with flammable particles. *Filled*. The amount of udon powder in the room wasn't nearly enough to make the room explode. Keima had told the apprentices that, and had them stealthily lay a trap on the fire magic tool.

The real nasty part of the trick was making the craftsmen believe that the clinking of metal could cause the explosion as well. Trying to throw or destroy a metal magic tool with metal armor could cause sparks itself. Thus, the trapped magic tool was instead made to fit gently, perfectly into the palm of a hand.

“Th-Th-That bastard! What was all that shit about us being able to land a hit on Lord 50 if everything went well?! Is that why he fuckin' said to use a magic tool since magic wouldn't make it in time?! What a load of shit!”

“Bwahaha! You didn't land a blow, but you did manage to get my cape! Feel proud of your accomplishment!”

“Huh? Th-Thank you! Nguuuh!”

Core 50 proceeded to drag each of the craftsmen out of the Dai-Frame one by one, throwing them into the apprentices and knocking them all out.

“It's true that reading one's mind means nothing if the person in question has no knowledge of the trap! Hahaha, an excellent move, Keima!”

Core 50 faced the next challenger, in an excellent mood.

Keima's Perspective

The craftsmen and their Dai-Frames were carried out of the dungeon. It seemed that the plot had ended in failure. Showing a small-scale explosion to the craftsmen to convince them of the powder explosion successfully led to

Core 50 falling into the trap, but he managed to dodge it because the magic tool trap itself hadn't been designed well enough to guarantee a hit.

"Gah, you damn liar. Thanks to you, Core 50 gave us some praise."

"So close. We were so close."

The Kobold and his craftsmen looked satisfied, while the apprentices were cradling lumps on their heads. But their sacrifices would not be in vain. Probably.

"Keima, what in the world did you tell them?" Wataru asked.

"Nothing much, just a little white lie. Anyway, we still have a lot of allies left. Hopefully at least one more of them can land a single blow."

The sun was still high in the sky, and we still had a mountain of challengers. There were surging waves of newcomers like there had been before, but I got the feeling the people striding over now were a lot more skilled than the faceless masses. They were probably the ones so cocky that they thought the game would be over as soon as they joined in, and that they might as well give everyone else an opportunity to have fun. Though that was pure assumption on my part.

"Mm. But it kinda sucks that all the beaten challengers are being carried out. I was planning on hiding someone in the mountain of losers and launching a surprise attack from there."

"Well, with this many people, the room would be literally buried in their bodies, so..." Wataru trailed off.

Incidentally, the ones doing the carrying were Core 50's high-rank slaves, all of whom had recovered from being knocked out. They were all satisfied by Aknera managing to land a blow, so they were following the elf maid's instructions and getting rid of the obstacles. *Tch.*

"Feel free to try landing another hit," I said as Ostle carried out another challenger, but he just shook his head.

"Nah, not a chance! Lord 50 really beat his superiority into us. Aknera's arm is all healed up now, and we know we won't be able to land a scratch on him

without another year of training. Plus, none of us thinks another surprise blow like that's gonna work on Lord 50. It was a one-and-done thing."

In other words, now that Core 50 had seen the trick, it wouldn't work on him again.

"Well, alright. At least you got a single hit in... Thanks?"

"Hahaha, nah, thank *you*. You gave us the chance to hit Lord 50," Ostle replied before returning to work with a fulfilled smile. The problem with Demon Realm people was that all their bloodlust faded on the spot once they finished the battle. I couldn't count on anyone going back for round two. They all looked too satisfied, damn it.

"...Oh well. Guess it's about time to go," I said, standing up and working my shoulders. Things had taken long enough that I would like the second hit to be landed soon.

"Oh! Finally our turn, Keima?" Wataru asked.

"Nah. It's not your time just yet, Wataru. Keep on handling visitors with Neruneh. Me and Ni—ahem! Kuro and I are going now. Let's go, Kuro."

"Yes, Master."

I corrected myself before saying "Niku" in front of Wataru, then went with her to the Boss Room where Core 50 awaited.

Core 50's Perspective

"Graaah, take this! {Slash}!" a Werewolf roared, swinging its long claws. That was the {Slash} skill from the claw branch rather than the sword branch, but either way, Core 50 dodged it without difficulty. "{Slash} {Slash} {Slash} {Slash} {Slash}!"

"Hoh, ha, hm, ha, ha."

It was a rapid flurry of blows. The claws rushed toward Core 50 from all sorts of angles, but he kept a cool eye on both arms and dodged them with ease.

"{Slash} {Slash} {Slash} Slash {Slash}!"

“A simple series of blows. Ah, that was a good attempt. I see you mixed a normal swing into the train.”

The Werewolf had simply shouted the word without using the skill once, then swung from a direction the skill never would have gone, but feints had no effect when Core 50 was reading your mind. That was enough playing around, so Core 50 blocked the attack and then flung the Werewolf over his back. The fighter, still swinging from inertia, landed onto a previously beaten Weretiger, and that was that.

“I suppose you would be strong enough to participate in the Fighter’s Tournament? Certainly not the Hell Tournament. Ah, but moving on...”

“My name is Abover Aes! Taste the blade of my Magic Lance Protrube and fa—Ngh!”

Core 50 dodged the strike without looking and tripped the attacker. “Naming yourself during a surprise attack defeats the purpose,” he said as the sound of a lance hitting the floor resounded. However, no lance could be seen. “Ah, it is an invisible lance. But weapons such as this will not work on I.”

The lance’s wielder was a fairly experienced warrior. He used his weapon like it was an extension of his own limbs, which thus made him an extremely easy opponent for Core 50 to understand and beat. A little mind reading revealed exactly what he intended, and those intentions were always followed through. It was safe to say that it would legitimately have been harder for Core 50 to fight an inexperienced commoner with barely any training.

“Hm.” Core 50 sensed a stirring of the mana in the air, and swung his body backwards. A huge beam of light shot by right where he had been.

“Tch. Not even that can hit you, huh?”

Core 50 faced the villain, and saw the man he had been waiting for. But he was alone.

“If it isn’t Keima. Good to see that you have finally come. Where are your allies?”

“My allies? You just finished throwing one of them over your shoulders.”

“Ah, yes. That’s right. That’s exactly right!” Core 50 declared, laughing in amusement. He had half-forgotten, but all the challengers who had visited his dungeon today were allies of Keima. Such was his strategy.

“You surprised me, Keima. To think you would turn this into a festival. I never thought the day would come that I would face all of my citizens in combat at once.”

“Good to know that even mind readers can be surprised sometimes. Does that count as landing a hit?”

“Ha ha ha! Not at all! Now, launch all your traps upon me!”

Honestly speaking, if they were to count psychological blows and surprises as hits, then Keima would have surpassed three hits long ago. Considering that he had landed an actual hit on top of that, it was fair to say that Core 50 had already lost the mental battle. But he hadn’t lost the physical battle.

And so, for the first time, Core 50 readied himself for a true battle. But Keima just leapt back without any hesitation.

“{Healing}! {Healing}! Hey, why the heck are you all dozing off?! The fight’s not over yet!” he yelled, waking up the defeated challengers.

“Wha, ah, b-but, my attack didn’t work on him at all...”

“Stay strong! Lord 50 is certainly not someone any of us could beat on our own, but we are not alone! We are allies here! Attack him all at once! Someone will land a hit on him for sure! And that will mark our victory!” Keima continued, hyping them up. “Don’t think about damage! Focus on speed, and area of effect! Just go at him!”

“Wh-What about coordinating the attacks?”

“No need! In fact, don’t think at all!”

“But then we’ll hit each other!”

“Don’t sweat it! I’ll heal you all! If you don’t give up, Lord 50 will face you as many times as you like! Don’t give up on this chance! Are you really a Demon Realm citizen?! Do you want to shame your ruler, Lord 50?!”

The warriors snapped back to reality, realizing their grave misunderstanding.

In reality, Core 50 would prefer them to stay asleep, but in the broader picture Keima was exactly right. A Demon Realm citizen shouldn't give up on winning just because they got a bit wounded. Thus, Core 50 could not object.

“This is entirely like an army... Thus, the classic move is to focus on the healers, and those in charge.”

Core 50 readied himself again, then focused on Keima. If he took things even a little seriously, he could easily dodge and launch attacks even without his Mind's Eye.

He dodged the attacks from the strong Demon Realm residents, counterattacked, and used mind reading to prepare for countering Keima's tricks. But this time, Keima had boldly come forth himself. He was holding a wooden sword in his hand, one sold in the city and used for practice duels .

A blade's not necessary if I just need to hit. The damage doesn't matter. Wood is lighter than metal, so it's better. I've got plenty of spares in {Storage}... I can't use Demon King style, but I'll overwhelm him with numbers!

Keima genuinely thought that. Could he be lying? The possibility was... not there, Core 50 determined. If it were a lie, then somebody must have lied to Keima and made him believe it? That wasn't possible.

Either way, he was finally leading the charge himself. Core 50 was excited, yet disappointed. Ultimately, Keima was still overwhelmingly weaker than Core 50. So much so that training only made him weaker, somehow. Even with the support of several reasonably strong Demon Realm citizens, none of his attacks would land without a miracle happening.

“Ngh! My Demon Fists can't even land a scratch!”

“The more mana arrows I shoot, the more he knocks them at my allies!”

“Ngh, on second thought, bringing poison to this fight was entirely meaningless...”

A Vampire fistfighter, an elf archer, and a snake beastkin poison-user all faltered. Each was strong enough to make it through pools in the Fighter's Tournament, but there was a vast gap in power between them and Core 50. Keima swung his sword while healing them and his other allies in the front lines.

Naturally, none of his swings hit Core 50.

In the end, Core 50 didn't even need to do anything for a mana arrow from the elf to hit Keima's wooden sword and shatter it. But even so, Core 50 smacked down the wooden fragments and dodged them all.

"Ngh! But I'm not done yet!" Keima yelled, opening his {Storage} and taking out a spare wooden sword. Out came the sword, and... wielding it with his right hand was a goat-headed Baphomet, the very same Core 564 that had been expelled from the Demon King faction not too long ago. He popped out of {Storage} with the sword.

"Huh?"

"What?"

Core 564's appearance was so shocking that Core 50 froze, stunned. Keima himself was shocked as well. And, clink. The stab happened so fast nobody even realized what was happening until it was too late. Core 564 had exploited the moment to successfully hit Core 50's foot with the second wooden sword in his left hand.

"Bwaahaaaah! Did you see that, Keima! I did iiiiiiit!" The roars of a Baphomet echoed throughout the dungeon.

Keima's Perspective

"Hold it! Why are you surprised?! Don't tell me you forgot I was in there!" Core 564 yelled tearfully.

No, but seriously. Why was he in my...

"Ah," I said, remembering the memories that Niku had sealed for me.

It all happened three days earlier. We were hashing out plots while successfully gathering an army of allies, and that was when Aidy had an idea.

"Incidentally, shall we summon that fool for help? Ah, what was his name... Core 564, I believe? I understand that he is still living somewhat nearby. No doubt he has the strength to at least enter the pools of the Hell Tournament."

Core 564, huh? Now that she mentions it, he used to be a Demon Realm Core. He's still in the Demon Realm even though he got booted out of the Demon King faction? I guess it's not so easy for Dungeon Cores to move.

"Do you know where he is, exactly?"

"Not quite. All I know is that he is somewhere near here."

Core 564 was a Dungeon Core that knew Demon King style, so he would be an excellent fighter to add to our ranks. *I wonder if he would actually come if I asked him to get here within three days?*

"How should we contact him?" Rokuko asked.

"Mm, good question... Ah. Aidy, can you do me a favor here? I just came up with something."

I repeatedly {Teleported} to the furthest point I could see, taking Aidy and me to her duchy at record speed. Inside it was a classic Demon Realm city with no walls whatsoever.

"How convenient. To think you could travel this far in less than half a day."

"It'll be faster on the way back. Though a direct teleportation takes way more mana."

"That is certainly a spell I would like for myself, Rokuko's Master... Now then. Shall we begin?"

Without further ado, Aidy sent a request for a Dungeon Battle to Core 629's (Mikan's) dungeon. He accepted, which opened a contact window between us.

An orange rabbit appeared on screen, stamping its foot. "Where's this coming from?! You won't get away with this, Aidy! Haku and Keima aren't gonna stay silent about... wait, what? Keima? What're you doing there?"

"Yo, Mikan. Calm down and listen for a second. I need your help with something."

I explained the circumstances to Mikan. I told him why I was in the Demon Realm and that we used the Dungeon Battle function to contact him. Then, I told him my request.

“Geez! You sure surprised me! My dungeon’s in a real tough spot where I may or may not get a Master, so now’s not the time to surprise me!”

“Sorry man, really.” He seemed busy, so I went ahead and got to the point. “So yeah, I need you to do something. You’re, like, a Dual Core now, right? You should be able to contact Core 564 instantly then, or rather, summon him. Could you ask him to come to where we are? We need the extra firepower.”

One of the functions Mikan had as a Dual Core was the ability to summon the Slave Core (Core 564) whenever he wanted. The Slave Core had no option to refuse.

“Why not just ask Core 564 directly instead of going through me?”

“What can I say? Sometimes you just need a good dose of fluffiness in your life.”

“Can’t blame you for that!”

While we were at it, I went ahead and had Aidy give him the mail function. That would let us contact him whenever we wanted, and it was another reason we contacted him directly... *Believe me, I didn’t forget about it until a second ago. This is a totally legitimate reason. I promise.*

“So yeah, could you summon Core 564, open up your gate, and send him over here? Oh, and feel free to lose the Dungeon Battle.”

“Oh my,” Aidy said. “I certainly don’t mind obtaining a free victory star.”

“Well, as long as you pay the DP for losing, Keima, I don’t mind.”

I had no idea about it since I had never lost a Dungeon Battle before, but the loser had to pay Father a DP fee. It was apparently 10,000 DP. *This is my first time hearing about this... Oh, but now that I think about it, maybe that’s why Haku gave us a little over 10,000 DP when we had that first Dungeon Battle?*

“I’ll pay you back once I can leave the Demon Realm. Put it on my tab.”

“Okie dokie. Don’t forget about it!”

Mikan’s DP wallet was pretty stuffed thanks to his ongoing idol business, and lending me 10,000 DP was no problem at all.

“Okay. Core 564, come here here heeeere.” Mikan said a random chant, and on his side of the screen a magic circle spread before spitting out Core 564.

“Hrm?! What is going on?! Ah, Core 629! Why have you summoned me?”

And so on and so on. We used the Dungeon Battle’s gate to safely get Core 564 to us in an instant.

“I see, you wish to borrow my power. And if I were to refuse?”

“Mikan, give him an order.”

“Core 564, you have to obey them!”

We were technically in the post Dungeon Battle meeting still, so Mikan could still speak through the monitor. Core 564 flailed in agony.

“Nghaaaaah! I understand, I understand! So, what do you wish for me to do? Hm...? Duel Core 50?! I see! The truth is, I am quite the fan of Core 50, and in fact I adopted this manner of speech out of admiration for him. I eve—”

He seemed fairly pleased by the observation, so I took that as a yes. I shut him up before he ranted for days and just got to the point.

“So basically, I want you to hit Core 50 with this wooden sword once I take you out of {Storage}.”

“Come again? I have my own Magic Blade, you know. And, ah, wait, you can put sentient things in {Storage}? That is news to me...”

It would probably take an uncomfortable amount of mana to teleport all three of us back at once, so I went ahead and put Core 564 right into storage. The fact that the teleportation still took a lot of mana led me to consider the possibility that living beings in {Storage} still increased the overall mana cost.

...Anyway. Thus concludes the flashback.

The plot ultimately ended up being a big success. It was all thanks to Core 564. *Thanks! I’ll let you duel Wataru later as a reward.*

“Alright, retreat!”

“What?”

“Er?”

I let out a declaration of retreat while shooting out {Element Burst} with no expectation of it working, and this time everyone except Core 50 froze in shock. He, meanwhile, narrowly dodged my {Element Burst} before multiplying and launching both nearby Demon Realm citizens and Core 564 into walls.

Oh shit, he's serious. I guess since he doesn't have any more chances, he's using his duplication for the first time today. That's a sign he won't be messing around anymore.

I fled the room and met up with Niku while everyone else was being destroyed.

"Welcome back. Here is the ring," Niku said, giving back the Succubus Ring I had lent her.

...Indeed. I had Niku let the Succubus possess her so that she could use Charms to seal my memories. Core 50 wouldn't be able to read my mind and guess my plans if I didn't have any memories of them. I mean, I wouldn't even know about them myself! She also used the Charms to modify my mental state so that I would fight on the frontlines without bringing Core 564 out of {Storage} too early. My wooden sword breaking would be a sign that I was right by Core 50. The result of this plot was as you saw.

"Thanks, Niku. Now we just need one more hit."

"Indeed."

As I patted Niku's head, Core 564 came charging this way while letting out a fairly bizarre roar. "Graaaaah! Y-You abandoned me back there...!"

"Hey, Core 564. Why were you crying when you came out of {Storage}?"

"I-I was not crying! That said, I am appalled by how cruel, merciless, and evil you must be to think up the idea of trapping someone within a hellish place like that! It was so dark! There was so little space! There was no sound! Anyone but I would have gone crazy in hours! I will forgive you since it allowed me to land a hit on the one and only Core 50, but still!"

Hmm...? I thought time stopped within {Storage}. It should have only been a second for him... Eh, whatever.

“Anyway, let’s take a quick rest before the final showdown. Let’s get back to the surface.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Hrm? Should I go as well...? I refuse to be put in {Storage} again! I will never enter such a place again! And more importantly, you should be praising me now! I had to search for the blade with my hands, unable to see, and I stayed on high alert for the entire time, ready to at—”

An oddly talkative fellow had joined our party, but whatever. I could just pass him off as yet another Demon Realm weirdo. He had in fact lived here as a noble demon just recently, so yeah. He was strong enough to live up to the reputation Demon Realm people had.

Core 50’s Perspective

Despite having been expelled from the Demon King faction, Core 564 the Baphomet was strong enough to participate in the Hell Tournament. Under typical circumstances, there was no doubt that Core 50 would have easily defeated him with little issue, but he simply hadn’t predicted such an unfathomable surprise attack. It was such a bizarre strategy that Core 50 found himself in disbelief. Putting Core 564 into storage, then pulling him out? With the person doing the pulling having forgotten the trap entirely? Core 50 had known for sure that Keima had been planning *something*. He knew, but after reading his mind... or rather, being tricked into reading his mind, Core 50 had been thoroughly convinced that there was no plan after all.

“Bwaha! Ahahahaha! Excellent! Excellent, Keima! You are the third person to ever outwit and outplay me so thoroughly!”

The first person was Core 6, the Great Demon King of the Demon King faction. He would use Detachment and Still Water Serenity to completely erase his active consciousness, then defeat Core 50 through raw power. That was the reason why Core 50 served Core 6 despite both of them being from the First Lot.

The second person was Chaos, Core 4. She was even worse than Keima when

it came to being surprising and thinking outside the box. Reading her mind was pointless, or rather, it was something one must avoid at all costs. You would be consumed by her chaos and lose your sanity. The fact that she was incredibly powerful on top of that just made her an even more formidable opponent.

And thus, Keima was the third. Unlike the first two, his mind could be read. He didn't have any impressive power to speak of. And yet, he could use the resources available to him to their maximum potential, not hesitating to drive allies to his side and involve even himself in his own plots, which successfully led to him landing two blows on Core 50.

“But there will not be a third!”

It was then that Core 50 finally unsealed his duplication ability. Previously, he thought he wouldn't need to get so serious, but that had changed. He now recognized Keima as an actual foe, rather than a mere challenger to defeat and possibly train. Core 50 offered a prayer of thanks to Father in gratitude for the joy of having met an actual foe. He would no longer let his guard down. He tensed up, ready for Keima to come at any moment.

And several hours passed, just like that.

“...Why does Keima not come?! The urge to fight is surging through my veins!”

The challengers that came next proved time-consuming to defeat, perhaps due to Keima encouraging them. They were all strong enough to either reach the grand finals of the Fighter's Tournament or to participate in the first round of the Hell Tournament. That would make them the absolute strongest fighters in Core 50's city, but... That was it. They posed no threat whatsoever if he faced them head-on and used his duplication properly.

“Ah...! Is this the ‘blueballing’ that Ishidaka the Hero spoke of? Ngggh! What incredible frustration I feel! I am not fond of this at all!” he declared, and just as he was running out of patience, the stream of challengers finally stopped.

“Hrm? Surely I did not defeat them all... No, there is still Keima and his party.”

Indeed. Keima and his party were all still healthy—the princess (Aidy), the slave Hero (Wataru), the pup (Niku), the banished (Core 564), and so on.

Perhaps now was finally their time.

“Apologies for the wait, Lord 50. It’s only now that it finally becomes our turn. Now, shall we dance? Escort the good man, Sebas.”

“As you wish, Milady.”

Inside the room walked the proud princess of the Demon Realm—Aidy. With her was her Master, Sebas.

“I’ve been waiting a long time too. Feels like forever ago since he said we just needed one more hit.”

“Me too. I can finally fight.”

Wataru, the Slave Hero. Niku, the pup.

“This time, I shall land a blow on Lord 50 with my own Magic Blade! Hmph!”

Core 564, awkwardly overconfident due to having landed a blow on Core 50.

“I’m also heeere. I won’t get in the waaay, so I would appreciate it if you didn’t hit meeee.”

...And finally, the maid of Rokuko, princess of the Laverio Empire. She was riding in a Dai-Frame similar to the ones that the magic tool craftsmen had used.

“...I do not seem to see Keima with you,” Core 50 said, confused to see that the man he had recognized as a foe was not there.

“...K-Keima is in the middle of a very important secret plot,” Wataru the Slave Hero said with a forced smile. ...Aidy shook her head. “Wataru, trickery means nothing before Lord 50. You might as well be honest here.”

“Er, but Aidy. This is a bit...”

“Hah! My victory is assured even without that weakling here!” declared Core 564.

The weakling... was not here. In other words, Core 564 was saying Keima would not be participating in the fight.

It was then that the pup stepped in front of Aidy and bowed her head to Core 50. “Forgive us, Lord 50. My Master is presently bedridden with stomach pain.”

“What?” Core 50 asked, confused by what he had heard.

Wataru and Core 564 elaborated.

“Erm, it was his food, Lord 50. I mean, I knew he went off to eat some meat skewers while he still had some time here, but to think he would eat Basilisk meat...”

“It is his fault for lacking resistance for such pitiful poison! I had some as well, and I am as fine, as you can see!”

Core 50 read their minds. However, what he found truly was Keima getting so enthusiastic about landing a second blow on Core 50 that he ate some skewers and ended up bedridden with stomach pain. His party had waited until the last second for him to recover, but it didn’t seem to be happening.

In short. Keima, his long-awaited foe, was not present. Core 50 slumped his shoulders in reflexive disappointment... But wait. Was that really the truth?

“I-I shan’t be fooled! The same trick will not work on me again! There is no doubt that you are all lying!”

“Nah, nah, we’re telling the truth. Keima really was in a lot of pain. If you can read minds, you can see images too, right? I’ll try remembering exactly what he was like, give me a second,” Wataru said, mentally envisioning the past. Core 50 also rea—

“I will not! This is simply not true! Keima is not here due to some plot you are attempting to hide from me! No, he *is* here! Within whose {Storage} is he hiding?!”

Indeed. There was no mistaking that everyone here had been fooled as part of some plot. Perhaps he was in {Storage} just as Core 564 had been. If Core 50 carelessly read their minds, he would end up tricked by Keima again somehow.

That was when Neruneh smoothly held out a blade. It was the very same unforgettable blade that had initiated this battle—the gleaming, one-of-a-kind orichalcum sword created by Father. All was being done for the sake of winning it.

“Lord 50, siiir. If you beat all of us heeere, this is yooooours,” Neruneh said

with a smile. She was telling the truth. He could tell by reading her mind. But nevertheless, she couldn't be trusted. Core 50 had fallen into manic distrust of his own mind-reading.

"Now then, Lord 50," Aidy began. "It seems that Keima has entirely run out of tricks by now. What will begin now is an honest and fair duel between our party and you. Feel free to read our minds if you wish, but it will be pointless. Isn't that right, Sebas? The pup's training was finished, I trust?"

She was alluding to Demon King style Detachment, no doubt. It was possible they might also use Still Water Serenity, the more advanced form of Detachment as well.

"She can manage it. Not well, but she's just barely there."

"...I'm not confident, but I will do my best."

"Hmph! I can use Detachment as well! You may all count on me!" Core 564 butted in.

Core 50 carefully eyed the four challengers that had varying degrees of training in Demon King style. As for Wataru, there were some Demon King style-esque moves in the Laverio Empire's styles, but he hadn't used any of them in the Hell Tournament. Though it was possible he had learned Detachment while staying in the Demon Realm.

"Oh no, I'll be using a trick-strat here. Keima taught it to me, or rather, forced it into me. Neruneh used some hypnosis on me for this, so... Here I go." Wataru readied his Holy Blade, then looked at Core 50 and yelled. "...BERSERK, ACTIVATE!"

Thus began the fight. Wataru's eyes changed. Core 50 read his mind—"DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE DIEDIIDEIDIDIEIDEIDIEDIIDEIDIEIEIEIDIE"—and found it dominated by the sole idea of killing him.

"Die die die die! {Giga Slash}, {Meteor Crush}, {Pure Air Slash}!"

"Hypnosis and self-suggestion! I see, that is certainly something Keima would do!"

But it was a strategy more than familiar to Core 50. He had fought more than

one challenger in the past who had focused their minds purely on killing Core 50. This resembled that greatly. The purity of the focus led to an increase in speed and attack power, but had the significant weakness of leading to more simple attack patterns. All of Wataru's attacks—his lightning-fast slash, his meteor-crushing stab, his contorting air beam—were all textbook usages of the skills, and thus easy for Core 50 to deal with.

However, Core 50 still unsheathed his swords and did not let his guard down for a second. Up until now he had been refraining from using a weapon, but he was facing the strategies of Keima, a true foe. He would face them with all his might.

“Oh my. Are you perhaps thinking of someone who isn't here, Lord 50?”

“...Ah. Forgive my rudeness, Princess.”

Wataru was launching simple attacks, but they became more unpredictable when two Detachment users—Aidy and Sebas—threw in their own attacks.

“Bwahaha! I shall land one more hit on Core 50, and prove my—nguh?!”

First, he flung away Core 564, who was getting annoying. Then he blocked Aidy and Sebas's attacks, which was trickier than it sounded since they were both dual-wielding swords.

“I shall train you for the first time in a long while, Princess.”

“Aha! Oh uncle, when will you stop treating me like a child? I am already a fine lady, close to instructor class. Sebas and I will be more than capable of landing a blow on you.”

“Being addressed like that is also nostalgic.”

Core 50 honed his focus further. He too was dual-wielding swords. His duplicate fended off Wataru's attack while stopping Niku, who had stealthily approached amid all the furious attacks.

“The berserker is the light, and the assassin hides in his shadow. A good combination, but you both lack experience. My duplicate is enough for both of you.”

“Ngh!”

“Die die die die! Die! {Charge}! {Charge}! {Charge}! ...{Omega Break!}”

Wataru cast {Charge} three times, which was a long-term spell that stocked mana and unleashed it later, and then swung his Holy Blade while three balls of mana appeared in the air. Due to his madness and inexperience his swing was clumsy by Core 50’s standards, and he knocked it aside with little effort. The blade hit the ground and smashed into it so hard that huge chunks of rock flew in every direction. Core 50 was thorough in destroying each of those rocks. He wasn’t letting his guard down. It was slack focus that led to the first hit landing.

Naturally, he needed to deal with Aidy and Sebas as well, not to mention the mostly irrelevant Core 564. They would not be using any fancy skills. Some aftershocks from Wataru’s destruction reached them, but it was largely a simple duel between Demon King style fighters.

And since Dungeon Cores didn’t even need oxygen, it was exceedingly quiet. The only sounds they made were the metallic clashing of blades.

Aidy was practically at the level of an instructor, while Sebas and Core 564 were assistant instructors, but Core 50 was a true master. In fact, he had invented Demon King style himself alongside the Great Demon King. His skill was as overwhelming as one might expect. Aidy’s ultimate move was {Crimson Road}, but he would never allow her the opportunity to use it, and even if he did, it ultimately amounted to a forward-facing area of effect attack with huge range and damage—something incredibly easy for Core 50 to dodge, even if he waited until the skill had activated and the beam of fire had started racing towards him.

“You are so strong, it is almost disgusting,” Aidy observed.

“So that is your assessment? You have grown stronger yourself, Princess.”

When Core 50 focused all his efforts into evasion and defense, not even three Demon King style users attacking him at once could come even close to scratching him. Not even a battle of endurance would be effective against him, considering how he had fought for an entire day and showed no signs of being even slightly tired.

“Nghaaah! I can no longer hold my breath!” Core 564 gasped.

“Understandable. Living creatures are imprisoned by the need to breathe,” Core 50 mused while exploiting the opening to throw Core 564 into a wall. Sebas would probably be close to needing to breathe soon as well.

“Good luuuck, Wataruuuu!”

“Nghaaah! Die die DIE DIE DIE! {Grand Bomb}! {Lightning Edge}! {Charge Release}! Fall to the earth pillars of lightning, {Lightning Spear}! Roar into the skies pillar of fire, {Flame Pillar}! Come forth from the ground, {Earth Pillar}!”

Neruneh’s cheers sent Wataru into an even more intense rampage, surpassing his limits to shoot out a storm of incredible attacks. The earth exploded into craters and electricity engulfed his Holy Blade. The {Charged} balls of life vanished, summoning three enormous pillars from the ground that shot magic attacks in every direction. *They would be problematic if left unattended*, Core 50 thought before having to pause to toss Niku away again. Their cooperation truly was excellent. The best way to stop Wataru’s rampage would be to hold him down and knock him unconscious, but Core 50 wasn’t allowed to... wait.

“...Ah. Now that I think about it, Core 6 only forbade from attacking during the special exhibition match. In these duels I am allowed to attack. How careless of me to forget that.”

“Oh my, what a shame... I had hoped to enjoy our duel for a bit longer.”

Core 50 finally realized the truth. In this fight, or rather, in all the fights of the day, he hadn’t been forbidden from attacking. He merely needed to hold himself back from killing them.

“Was this one of Keima’s plots as well? He certainly played me for the fool, then.”

The rest of the fight happened fast. It was a one-versus-five fight, but quality weighed the scales far more heavily than quantity. Core 50 was unmistakably the peak of Demon King style, and when he moved seriously, it was safe to say that his victory was as unavoidable as fate.

Core 564 was crushed in an instant, and Wataru’s neck was squeezed until he fell unconscious. The same was done to Niku, leaving it down to Aidy and Sebas,

a two-on-two duel with his duplicate in consideration. He had no chance of losing whatsoever.

The fight ended with pitiful ease, taking even less effort than the fights prior to it.

“I suppose this is the best one can do with a full-front attack,” Core 50 mused, relaxing his shoulders with satisfaction. The only one left was Neruneh with the orichalcum blade, but...

“Here you gooo. It’s yooours.”

...She held out the blade to him without a fight, still giving a small smile.

“I-I truly can? Truly?”

“Yes, it’s truuue. This is now yooours.”

...Core 50 stayed on guard and sent his duplicate first.

Thus. He felt the blade was true orichalcum. He had his duplicate swing it. It was light like a feather.

With that established, Core 50 finally took the orichalcum blade into his own hands.

“Oooh! What a splendid gleam!”

Core 50 trembled with emotion. In his hands was Father’s orichalcum blade. He felt a stir in his metaphorical heart. At last, the blade was his, and only his.

“I have protected Father’s blade! I won! I have succeeded!”

He lifted the orichalcum high in the air. It shone, entirely as if to bless Core 50’s victory, and...

Clink!

A hole twisted open in the gauntlet holding the sword, and at the exact same time a stone stake extended from it and hit Core 50’s helmet.

“...Hrm?”

For a second, he didn’t understand what had happened. The hole closed and the stone stake fell to the ground. It hit the dungeon floor and rolled with a

clink. Through the hole he could see the gleam of the orichalcum blade's hilt. The hole closed as if nothing had ever happened.

“Wha... What?!”

Core 50 looked between his hand and the orichalcum blade. What had happened? The stone stake indicated he had been hit with {Stone Pyre}? But why had that come from the orichalcum blade?

...And that was when Core 50 remembered. “No! C-Could it be... Did you really?!”

Normally Core 50 would never, ever do this. But he had been pushed to his brink. He faced the sword and used his Mind's Eye.

“Heya! Good fight. Man, I'm glad that worked!”

“KEIMAAAAA?! You can transform into even orichalcum?!”

...The attack had unmistakably come from Keima.

Epilogue

The last strike had landed. Let me go through the strat I executed after landing the second blow.

First, and most importantly, it was urgent that we leave immediately. Core 50 would take things seriously as soon as we landed the second blow, so leaving and giving him some time to cool his head would make things easier for us. Hence me acting all pumped after bringing Core 564 back.

“Alriiight! At this rate, the third blow’s gonna be cake! Bring some meat, some meat! I wanna celebrate!” I declared.

“I knew this would happen, Keima, so I already bought some!”

And so, with some clutch support from Rokuko, I got my poisoned meat skewers. By clutch support I meant that I had asked her to preemptively buy Basilisk skewers, since Basilisk meat had a poison that hurt the stomachs of those who weren’t used to eating it.

I then ate them in front of everyone, hurting my stomach and rushing to the toilet. It was actually worse than I expected, so I used {Healing} to get well enough to move before crawling out in front of everyone.

“A-Are you okay, Keima?”

“This is actually bad... (As in, worse than I thought...)”

As far as I could tell, I had broadcasted my ill health without being suspicious in the least. It helped that Core 564 was there to loudly say “Ah, on closer inspection, this is Basilisk meat! It gives you food poisoning if you aren’t used to eating it!”

“...Can I ask you guys to wait until the poison blows over?”

“I guess we have to.”

And so, I restrained Wataru and the others who were pumped to go try and land the final hit as promised, while gambling on the remaining Demon Realm

residents managing to land a hit. Niku was really concerned for me. Aidy and Core 564 just laughed at me for having a weak stomach. In the Demon Realm, it was your fault if you didn't have poison resistance built up.

In any case, I left the desks to Niku and the others as I retreated into an inn room. Rokuko was coming along to look after me. Though in reality, she had a method by which to heal me.

"Now, shall we begin?" Rokuko said smugly.

"...Yep."

The key player here was the Divine Comforter. Just being covered with it would recover me back to full health in only a single hour. The Divine Quilt could actually achieve a similar result, but anyway. Once I was fully covered, I had Rokuko tell the others she was still worried about my stomach, planning to keep them in place until Core 50 had calmed down. That wasn't a lie, by the way—she never said that I was better yet.

We kept an eye on Core 50 with Rokuko's rats while killing time. Aidy and the others were starting to lose patience. But if you thought about it, Aidy's reward for joining us was a duel with Wataru, unlike the other Demon Realm residents. In other words, it would be no sweat off my back if they didn't get to end up fighting Core 50. I mercilessly had them continue waiting.

"Mm."

But the sun began to set without Core 50's intensity cooling down for a second. Thus, having no other choice, I decided to let the two Cores and the Hero go fight before they just left and went for it on their own. Given how they were already colluding to leave, I couldn't afford to wait any longer.

The plan was for them to attack him head-on, using Demon King style and Neruneh's hypnosis (i.e. Charms performed through Succubus possession) to stop his mind reading, but either way it would be an impossible battle if Core 50 started attacking midway through. Thus I had a plan for just that.

I knew from the memo that Core 50 would select a specific target before reading their mind in particular. In which case, it would be unlikely for him to notice if I used {Ultra Transform} to transform into something with no mind, like

a Golem or some such. He wouldn't be used to attempting to read the minds of things without minds at all.

Thus, I transformed into the orichalcum blade that was being offered as his reward. That was the most likely form to trick Core 50 into lowering his guard.

By the way, I had already confirmed that I could use spells like {Pitfall} and {Stone Pyre} while in sword form. That was probably something only I could do, as someone capable of casting spells without chants based purely on thoughts and imagination. The orichalcum blade itself would naturally work as a spawn point for {Stone Pyre} since it's made of metal. Though the stake would just fall off afterwards.

Naturally, there were a lot of conditions for me getting close to Core 50 as the orichalcum sword. First and foremost, I couldn't move by myself. Trying to use momentum from magic to move would reveal myself in an instant. With that in mind, my sword surprise attack would be a last resort to execute if Aidy, Wataru, and the others failed to land a hit.

This was where the cover story of me getting sick and bedridden would be useful. After all, me transforming into an orichalcum sword meant that I would be noticeably absent from the fight itself. Missing the fight due to being sick would be all the cover story I needed. This was all planned out from the start. *It's true! I spent all week polishing this plan to perfection.*

So, the most natural way for me to be handed to Core 50 in my transformed state would be as his reward for winning. I asked Rokuko to have Neruneh hold sword-me during the fight.

"Neruneh. I have a message from Keima: Give this sword to Core 50 without any fight if everyone else loses. And tell Core 50 that Keima said that the sword belongs to him."

"Okaaay, as you wiiish."

There were no lies in that. I couldn't move while I was a sword, and I was still Core 50's slave (although the collar went away when I transformed), so I technically did belong to him. Using deceptive language to trick people without lying sure is fun and morally acceptable!

Incidentally, Rokuko would be waiting in the room, with a Goblin under the covers instead of me. That was for fooling the map. We also closed the desks by the dungeon, that way we could build up one final rush if necessary.

So yeah, with Neruneh holding me in clear sight, I stealthily snuck up on Core 50. He was shocked by my absence, and immediately fell into deep paranoia toward basically everything. He was exactly right when he concluded I was there and planning something. But that was where I had Neruneh hold out Core 50's prize (me).

"Lord 50, siiir. If you beat all of us heeere, this is yooooours," Neruneh said with a smile.

Core 50's attitude visibly changed. As expected, his warrior heart was weak to the beauty of a perfect orichalcum blade crafted by Father.

So, we launched a full-frontal attack on Core 50 using Demon King-style and hypnosis (Charms), but he was as strong as expected. He was *too* strong. He did end up realizing he could attack midway through, and that removed any chance we had of victory. Like, goddamn. We even broke Wataru's mind and turned him into a murderbot that could only say "die," and that still wasn't even *close* to enough. The only chance we had was surprise attacks. Surprise attacks are justice! History is written by the winners, and surprise attacks led to winning.

Once Core 50 dominated our attack party, he first had his duplicate give the sword a light investigation, then took it himself. He was suspicious of it, but not enough.

"Oooh! What a splendid gleam!"

By the time he was groaning with joy, I had already stabbed Core 50's palm with a {Pitfall} mana stake. Or, rather, it stabbed through him when he extended his palm, so I didn't have to really put any effort into it.

"I have protected Father's blade! I won! I have succeeded!"

One is most vulnerable the moment they conclude they have won. I read that in a book.

So yeah, I opened the {Pitfall} hole in the palm of Core 50's hand (which was completely out of his view), then hit his head with {Stone Pyre}. It went off

without a hitch. I decided to launch it to hit his head so he couldn't try to say that he had just blocked the stake with his hand.

Whew, what a relief. If this didn't work, the only plan I had left was using {Pitfall} to dig tunnels beneath the dungeon and launch an enormous {Stone Pyre} from beneath the ground in a surprise attack while the crowd waiting at the top all rushed him at once! Oh, though there was the ultimate scumlord strat where I exploited the fact that no end time for the duel was established, then ran away and kept the festival going until enough top-tier Hell Tournament fighters gathered to collectively overwhelm him. Hahahaha. Whew.

And so, we landed three hits on Core 50 as planned, ending the festival with our victory. Good work, everyone!

* * *

Core 50 removed the collar from my neck, now treating me as a visitor instead of a slave. I mean, I had been taking it off all the time with {Ultra Transformation}, but it turned out that Core 50 had always been planning on freeing me early if I landed a hit. Demon Realm people were honestly a lot more considerate and nice than you would think.

So, moving on to the day after the festival. We were having lunch in Core 50's mansion, having something of a... group discussion on what had happened? An after party? Something like that. Neruneh and Sebas were standing beside the table as servers, but everyone else had a healthy bowl of steak udon in front of them—even Core 564. We could even have as many extra servings of steak and udon as we wanted.

...It turns out, steak udon was a sign of praise in the Demon Realm, and him serving it so often had been him showing his respect for the high quality of my work here. That sure was something I did not notice.

"It is my utter defeat," Core 50 said, and with that I got the Divine Pajamas from him. I didn't know how to feel about him sorta casually tossing them at me at the dinner table. *I feel this kind of thing usually has an award ceremony, or like, something more... eh... whatever.*

"Never did I expect to be so psychologically driven into a corner during this fight. You have my thanks for exposing yet more of my inexperience."

“I aim to please,” I said, and Core 50 nodded before removing his helmet. He had a human head due to being in human form, and after stabbing a slice of steak with a knife he took a huge bite out of it.

“Uncle, might I ask you to eat with more grace? The sauce is flying everywhere,” Aidy chided.

“Hrm... But the food tastes best when I do this.”

It definitely does feel good to really bite into huge chunks of meat, but if you're not careful about chewing it'll probably get stuck in your throat. Risky business.

“So, Keima. How did you land that final blow, anyway? We were all unconscious and didn't see,” Wataru said.

“It's a secret. I might need to pull the same trick in a fight with you someday.”

“I dunno, we probably won't... actually, okay, let's go fight right now.”

Nope. No reason to.

“I shall not give specific details, but know that he landed a solid blow to my head.”

“To your head! Goodness, how impressive. Sebas, what technique do you think he used?” Aidy asked.

“No clue. Probably wasn't Demon King style, though. I'm guessing that maid over there saw, but like hell she'll tell us.”

“Wataruuu, would you like some breaaad? I'll sell it for cheaaap,” Neruneh said, blatantly changing the subject and taking some bread from {Storage}.

“Thanks, Neruneh. I was just thinking this steak could use a side of bread... Mmm, yep, tastes good.” Wataru took the bread from Neruneh and ate it with his steak. *You're really okay with her just casually charging you like that? I mean, I guess it's Wataru we're talking about, but...*

“Keima, say aaaah.” Rokuko came over, sticking a forkful of steak into my face.

“I can eat on my own.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Say aaah.”

“Could you at least cut the steak into smaller bites?”

Niku was chomping down on a mountain of meat while watching Rokuko and me. Her tail was wagging happily.

Incidentally, just as I was thinking that Core 564 was being oddly quiet, I noticed that he had vanished out of nowhere. But I soon got a mail that read: “Mikan summoned me, even though I was in the middle of a meal with Core 50!” I was impressed that he had mastered texting so quickly. Anyway, he had been summoned to prepare for some idol-guarding event.

Right after we finished eating, Core 50 offered to have a post-meal duel for exercise. I politely refused and left to go shopping with Rokuko. Aidy and Sebas would be cashing in their reward duel with Wataru, so we went our separate ways.

“I’m kinda surprised Neruneh went with their group,” I commented.

“What’s the problem? It may not look like it, but those two are pretty close.”

With Niku as our guard, we went to buy the souvenirs that we had completely forgotten about until now.

“Oooh! If it isn’t the special-rank! Yesterday was great, lemme give you this as thanks!”

“I can’t believe you landed a hit on Lord 50, man! Let’s duel!”

“Yo, Keima. Is that babe beside you that girl you were talking about being the only one for you?”

We wandered through Core 50’s city, getting a lot of gifts, getting called over by a lot of passersby, and being teased a lot. If you excluded the fact that most of the citizens were basically monsters and that they all loved to fight, well, it wasn’t that different from the empire.

...Though empire cities have a surprisingly large number of monsters hiding as demihumans. It’s ruled by a Dungeon Core, after all. Her subordinates are all the ones in power.

Then came night. It was time to sleep.

My room had been moved to the guest hall now that I was a guest. It felt a bit fancier, but it wasn't that much different. I was using my own futon either way.

More importantly, my plan was to go ahead and sleep in the Divine Pajamas right off the bat. I eagerly took them out and got changed.

Whoa. This feels... It fits so perfectly, and I can move so freely, it almost feels like I'm not wearing anything at all. They're not impacting the movement of my joints at all. These might just be the best possible pajamas that can exist. Hm? Oh, wow, they look just like my normal jersey. I guess they morph to look like the wearer's favorite pajamas? I would expect nothing less from the Divine Pajamas.

"I'm coming in, Keima." Rokuko entered with the Divine Quilt.

There she is. I'm pretty sure it'll be safe for me to wear the Divine Pajamas since Core 50 personally bequeathed them to me, but my safety will be guaranteed if I sleep under the Divine Quilt too. Definitely. Probably. Maybe? If anything can block divine punishment, it would be a divine shield. But either way, I put on the Divine Pajamas early so I wouldn't have to change in front of her.

"Keima, are those the Divine Pajamas? They just look like the jersey you always wear."

"Yup. Seems like they transform into whatever pajamas the wearer likes most."

"Wow! That sounds fun. Keima, I want to try them on!"

"Hold it, Rokuko. Are you telling me to change in front of you? Are you planning to change in front of me?"

"Yes. Well, I guess even married couples need to be careful about that. Am I right?"

How many times will I have to say we're not married...?

Still, I knew Rokuko was just joking. She giggled, then looked a little sad.

"You know, Keima... I had really been looking forward to this. To spending the whole month in the Demon Realm with you. But this whole, whoooooole time,

you've just been doing work for Core 50! You didn't spend any time with me."

"...Uhhh. Well. Sorry?"

I dunno about that. Putting aside the first week, we met up pretty much every day at noon. In fact, while practicing magic I even napped (passed out from mana exhaustion) with you every day...

"I thought that we would be spending this whole honeymoon together... but we would have had more time together if we stayed at home. I guess it's okay since you wanted the Divine Pajamas, but still."

"I mean, uh. My bad? Wait, this isn't a honeymoon!"

"It basically is." Rokuko puffed out her cheeks in a pout. "I really was looking forward to this, okay...? I mean, I know how scared you are of my sister. I thought we could do all sorts of things here where her eyes don't reach."

You were thinking that, Rokuko? Well then. I guess that would make me a good-for-nothing.

"So, can't we at least be a married couple right now...? Just for now. Please, Keima? At the very least, I've been trying to be the best wife I can be during this trip. Was that wrong of me?" Rokuko asked, pursing her lips. But her cheeks were bright red.

"It wasn't wrong. I, uh... Well. I would, uh, I would definitely be happy if you were my wife, Rokuko."

"I know."

"Oh. You knew, huh?"

Rokuko laughed. I continued.

"I guess since we're in dungeon territory, Haku won't find out...?"

"...Is that a yes? If you say it like that, I'll want us to act like a married couple when we get home, too."

"Er, well. As long as we don't go so far that she finds out," I said while averting my eyes out of embarrassment. Rokuko responded by burying her face in my chest.

“Aaah...! Geeeez...”

“Rokuko?”

“You just alwaaays have to say things like that... Geez,” Rokuko said while pulling out the Divine Comforter for some reason.

“Huh? Weren’t we using the Divine Quilt tonight...?”

“Well... Won’t it be extra safe to use them both?”

“Good point. Even if the pajamas don’t work, the comforter and quilt should cancel it out.”

“Uh-huh. This way, we can rest easy. Anyway, hurry. Go go go go.”

I headed to the futon with Rokuko pushing me from behind. I got on my back with her hurrying me, and she climbed in next to me like it was the most natural thing in the world. *I-I mean, I guess she is my wife right now? I can hardly complain.*

“Want me to sing a lullaby? I learned one of the Demon Realm’s lullabies.”

“Er, I mean... Sure? Go ahead?”

“Okay... Mmm mmm mmm.”

Rokuko began to piece together a melody with airy whispers. Maybe due to the auto-translator not working, I didn’t understand exactly what the lyrics were. But there was a gentle wave-like tempo, and the melody invited sleepiness.

I fell asleep, guided by Rokuko’s cute singing voice.

When I woke up, it was already morning, and I was hugging Rokuko like a dakimakura.

“I sure slept soundly...”

“Mm... Morning, Keima.” Rokuko wiggled in my arms a bit, grinning with sleepy eyes. “...I guess we’re leaving the Demon Realm soon. You finished what you were doing here and we learned a lot, so.”

“Yep.”

There was some time I lost from being in {Storage} too. Now that it was over, it felt like a long, yet short month here.

“But y’know, I never did learn what power the Divine Pajamas have... Ah.”

It suddenly hit me that I could just ask Father directly if I wanted to know. I went ahead and opened the menu. It was the mail function’s time to shine. Ah... there was already a mail from Father. *When did that get there? It had to have been after lunch yesterday, but that’s all I know.*

Anyway, let’s read this... “Keima, I see you’ve gotten the pajamas! And your relationship with Rokuko’s making big strides. To celebrate that, I’ll tell you what effect the pajamas have!” Wait... he was watching? Uh.

But in any case, getting to the point. In addition to the regenerative properties and incredible comfort that the other pieces of the Divine Bedding had, the Divine Pajamas would automatically counter any attacks made on the wearer while they’re sleeping. I felt kind of moved by that, since I had given a similar effect to a set of Wearable Golems before.

But from Father’s perspective, it was apparently a bit of a failure. If one were to sleep with the Divine Pajamas and Divine Quilt at the same time, the quilt’s power to nullify external attacks would take priority, so in practice the Divine Pajamas just never activated. Though they technically would work if you were attacked from within the quilt.

“...Aaah. That explains why I pretty much can’t move at all.”

“Wait, what? Did you attack me while I was sleeping or something?”

“I poked your cheek, and you grabbed me in this hug. I couldn’t move, so I just went back to sleep.”

What a counterattack. Guess that’s how the Divine Pajamas work. *But wait. Does that mean these pajamas are basically designed to deal with the person you’re sleeping with attacking you? And Father made the Divine Bedding for the creator god to use. In other words, the creator god was afraid of people he brought to his futon attacking him?!*

“Was he cheating...? Or no, was he sleeping with assassins or something?”

“What are you talking about, Keima?”

“Nothing, nothing.” *This line of thinking is really going nowhere.*

And so, it was finally time to head back to the Laverio Empire.

“It was a weird time, but thanks for everything, Core 50.”

“Indeed. Come again whenever you like. Will you hold a festival next time as well? If so, I will need to begin training in preparation as soon as I can,” Core 50 said before heading immediately to one of his training grounds.

Pretty sure that's where the high-rank slaves train. Do I feel sympathy for them? No, because sympathy is not appreciated in the Demon Realm. Why? Because it's the Demon Realm. Like, it's the Demon Realm. They would love Core 50 just dropping by to say hello, so this will be like a dream come true.

Anyway, the elf maid at least stuck around and saw us off, bowing her head as we got into the carriages and left. She was the only one, but that was fine.

On the road to the Demon Realm capital, Wataru suddenly looked up in realization. “It just hit me that when we get back to the empire, I’ll finally be a normal Hero again.”

“Oh yeah, that’s true. Nice. Congrats, Wataru.”

“Ahaha. Thanks, Keima.”

Indeed. At the moment he was still a slave since we were in the Demon Realm, but he no longer had any debt. He wouldn’t be a Slave Hero, nor would he be the Hero of Debt. At last he was free... and that was when Neruneh slapped him on the back.

“Congratulatiooons, Wataruuu.”

“Yup. Thanks, Neruneh.”

Neruneh gave him a bright smile. Wataru had basically stuck around as an excuse to be with her, but well, hopefully this wouldn’t be his last opportunity like this.

“Alsooo, you were with me the whole time, soooo... you have to pay for thaaat. I believe it was five golds per hooour?”

“Huh?”

“You will pay, riiiight?”

Oh man. Now that she mentions it, I did mention something like that when we first met Wataru at the Demon Realm. Did you really remember that and count every single hour, Neruneh...?

“Wha?! Er, ah, w-was Keima being serious about that?!”

“We spent sixteen hours a day togeeeether, for twenty-five daaays. That’s four hundred hooours.”

Four hundred hours times five golds equaled two thousand gold coins. *Oh man, that’s convenient. Doesn’t that mean they spent basically all of their waking hours together for a whole month? Holy shit, Neruneh.*

“What. Whaaat?!” Even Wataru had to give Neruneh a double-take.



“I stayed with you the whole tiiiiime. Even during the duel with Core 50, riiight?”

“...Y-You did, but...”

“You’re going to pay, riiight?”

I mean, we’re talking about a charge of two thousand gold coins here (i.e. roughly two billion yen). Wataru may have a crush on Neruneh, but that’s just going too far. It’d be going too far for anyone. I mean, seriously?

“You’ll keep visiting me every month to bring the hundred golds, riiight...? Just like alwaaays?” Neruneh looked up at Wataru, leaning toward him. Her cheeks looked a little red, and... “I’ll give you another lap pilloooooow.”

That single whisper sealed the deal.

“A-Alright! You got it, absolutely! I am a Hero, after all! I’ll pay it! I will! I’ll get it done!”

“U-Uh, Wataru? Even I think this is kind of fucked up.”

“It’s fine, Keima. Really, it’s not that much different from how things were before this trip anyway... though the total shot back up. Aaah, the Demon Realm sure was a good vacation! I got to spend the whole time with a cute girl, so yeah!” Wataru grinned.

“Well saaaaid. Sooo, here’s your rewaaard.”

“Huh?”

In the midst of the bouncing carriage, Neruneh grabbed Wataru’s head and gave him a kiss on the cheek. *Whoa, Wataru. You sure are looking red now.*

Rokuko’s eyes were shining. “Not bad, Neruneh...! You go girl!”

“Er, uh...”

“Is something wrooong?” Neruneh asked, smiling her usual smile.

“...I’ll work hard to earn all the money!”

“Okaaaay. I’ll be looking forward to all your souveniirs.”

Uh. Well, I guess it’s good that he’s motivated and feels good about this? That

said, uh, Wataru's taste in women is kind of... Not that I'm gonna diss good ol' Neruneh here, but man. Like, I'm actually starting to doubt whether Wataru actually has {Ultra Good Fortune}... Or wait, maybe spending a whole month with the girl he likes cancels out all the bad...?

Either way, Wataru would be going from a Slave Hero back to a Hero of Debt. It would take twenty more months before he could be a normal Hero again. *That'll make it about three years in total spent grinding gold for us. Have fun?*

And so, with that last twist out of the way, Aidy took us all the way to the Demonic Capital, where we met up with Haku. We ended up returning to the empire in an even greater rush than we had left it. There was just one problem.

"Why are you coming with us, Aidy?"

"Oh? Were you not aware? This cultural exchange goes both ways."

Indeed. Aidy was following us to the empire. Her plan was to just learn about the empire's culture like we had learned about hers.

The carriage we were riding had four chairs with Rokuko, Haku, Aidy, and I sitting in a square shape. Between us was a circular table. The carriage was so needlessly big and shook so little that we could even have a tea party inside if we wanted. And it seemed we did want to, because there definitely was tea on the table.

"So, how was the Demon Realm, sweet little Rokuko? Did you enjoy yourself?" Haku asked, sipping tea from a mithril tea set that wouldn't break even if one were to accidentally drop it.

"Mm. It wasn't very fun."

"Oh, is that so? Perhaps I was an insufficient host. I should have been more firm about the meat blankets..."

"No no, Aidy. It's not your fault. I'm just sad I didn't get to spend much time with Keima."

"Ah, of course," Aidy replied with a nod. Haku, meanwhile, glared at me while simultaneously smirking at my misfortune. "And you, Keima? How did you find the Demon Realm?"

“It was surprising in more ways than one. In particular, the fact that battles to the death are a sign of two people being close, and wars are seen as a diplomatic expression of friendship, shows just how fundamentally different they are from the empire. I’m one to talk, but it felt like visiting another world.”

“...Excuse me?” Haku widened her eyes in surprise. “Core 666. Is that true? Do you see war as a... diplomatic expression of friendship?”

“Hm? I’m afraid I don’t understand what you’re asking,” Aidy replied, tilting her head.

“Of course, it was a foolish question. Don’t surprise me with jokes like that, Keima.”

“Indeed. Even children know that, after all. What would war even be if not an expression of friendship?”

Haku did a double take.

“...What kind of logic is that? War is, I mean, it’s so violent. It’s an attack.”

“Hm? Yes, it certainly is an attack. Much like a duel between countries, isn’t it?”

“Ah. Aaah...” Rokuko trailed off, the look on her face making it clear she understood what was going on here, but wasn’t sure if she should say anything.

“Haku. The words are the same, but they mean different things. In Demon Realm culture, dueling is a sign of being close friends. You fight people because you like them, and if you dislike them you just ignore them entirely.”

“...In other words, that is why the Demon Realm so frequently instigates wars with my empire? Don’t tell me they think they’re being friendly. That’s why they antagonize the messengers I send, even?”

“Almost definitely. In fact, the more you send strong fighters as mercenaries, the more they’ll pick fights with them.”

Haku looked at Aidy again. Aidy returned her look with a broad smile.

“...Keima, please write and deliver a report on Demon Realm culture to me. I’ve been stricken with a sudden headache, and I will be moving to another carriage to rest.”

“Er. Right.”

It was only then that I remembered writing a report like that was the official reason for our trip in the first place. *I’m surprised Haku didn’t know that about Demon Realm culture after spending five hundred years right next to them, but well, if I weren’t used to adapting to the culture of other worlds the same thing would have happened to me. It’s hard enough to understand people from the same culture, much less people of an entirely different one. Language sure is scary.*

“Hm? Did Haku not realize just how fond Grandfather is of her?” Aidy asked with a tilt of her head.

As an aside, I later sent a mail to Core 564 asking if Core 6 and Haku were actually close friends, and he replied that only Core 666 would ever make such a grave misunderstanding. He was very insistent that these were two entirely separate things, which confirmed that they were in fact not friends at all.

In any case, we safely returned alive from our cultural exchange in the Demon Realm.

Extra Episode — Ascendance of an Outcast

Core 564 was a Baphomet-type Dungeon Core that formerly belonged to the Demon King faction. He had been banished by his king, and in a twist of fate ended up the lackey of the traitor faction he had previously been at war with. On top of that, he was forced into being the Slave Core of a pitiful rabbit-type Dungeon Core named Mikan (Core 629), which meant he could be summoned away to do his bidding at the drop of a hat.

“Aha! At first I wasn’t sure how this worked out, but you sure are a hard worker, Core 564! Becoming a Dual Core was definitely the right idea!”

“Ngh, ngh, grrr! What humiliation...!”

For someone with Demon Realm values, it was unbearable to serve someone smaller and weaker than yourself. He attempted to disobey Father’s instructions and rebel against Mikan countless times. But each time, he was subjugated. Mikan being registered as his Master Core meant that his body would freeze if he tried attacking him, and if he disobeyed one of Mikan’s orders, searing pain would shoot through his body as if he was being hit by lightning.

“If only you would hurry up and move over here.”

“You fool! My stores of DP are barren due to you! My land in the Demon Realm has been confiscated, and at this point my daily DP income is a mere 500 DP! And, at the peak of foolishness, you are even saying that I can only spend 100 DP of that to save the rest for moving!”

It took significant time and resources to move a Dungeon Core. In general, one would have to slowly expand one’s Dungeon Territory while moving the actual Core along with it. Having multiple dungeons all over the place like Keima just didn’t happen unless Father’s whims led in that direction. Core 564 would appreciate some of that whimsy being directed toward moving Dungeon Cores, but he still had some lingering regrets toward the Demon Realm and the Demon King faction, so it was easy to imagine him just muttering complaints if

someone brought it up to him.

“Huh? You’re not happy with a hundred DP a day? But that’s enough to eat a whole bellyful of strawberries!”

Well, it was important to understand that Mikan lived in abject DP poverty before Keima got to work on him. A hundred DP a day was, to him, quite a lavish lifestyle. Naturally, Mikan still being stuck in that mindset made Core 564 furious.

“Do not push a child’s (600 lot) values on an adult (500 lot)! Gah, enough of this! I shall work no further! Why must I till fields?! You can summon the water spears yourself! Buy the food you eat with your own DP!”

“I need to make fields of the carrots Keima gave me to get more of them! They’re top-tier carrots, and they sell surprisingly well. Almost as much as the idol goods.”

Incidentally, it was common practice in the Demon Realm to have Skeletons perform manual labor in farms, but Core 564 didn’t know that since he had ignored all that to live a life of leisure. His city had been famous as an entertainment district.

“Well, if you really insist, I don’t mind giving you a break! I’m a Beddhist now in Keima’s honor, and resting is real important in it.”

“Ah! C-Can I trust those words?! There is much I would like to do!”

“Wow, you sure jumped on that fast. Have I been working you that hard...?”

And so Core 564 got a break from work, and was sent to his dungeon territory in the Demon Realm.

“Bwahaha! There should still be enough time for me to make it!”

There was something Core 564 wished to do. In simple terms, he wanted to participate in the Hell Tournament, the biggest event in the Demon Realm. All Dungeon Cores of the Demon King faction—or in other words, all noble demons—were entered into the tournament automatically, but Core 564 had already been banished. He wouldn’t be allowed to participate. However, there was one backdoor inside.

The Fighter's Tournament, which was held once every few years, was the key to everything. Its victor was awarded the prestigious right to participate in the Hell Tournament! Naturally, Core 564 would need to win in the Fighter's Tournament for this to work, but it was ultimately like a weaker version of the Hell Tournament. He had enough experience in the latter that just a little exercise would be enough for an easy win.

But unfortunately, to enter the Fighter's Tournament, one first had to win pools in the local region. One would only be given the right to enter the Hell Tournament after winning in local pools and then once again winning in the Demonic Capital's Fighter's Tournament, but... the entry period for those pools had already ended. By now the victors of the various regions would be in the process of gathering at the Demonic Capital.

"However! I can, in truth, still participate in the Hell Tournament! There are no flaws in my plan!"

The winners of the pools brought medals as proof of their victory to the Demon Capital. Said medal had no personal information engraved on it whatsoever. The medal itself was all that mattered, which meant that if you could steal the medal from the winner, you would be allowed to join the fray in their place! On top of that, this was officially sanctioned within the Fighter's Tournament rules. It was founded on the principle that if one could not protect their medal, then whoever stole it was a better fit for the tournament anyway.

The pool winners could hire guards, or they could boldly face the challengers themselves. They were even allowed to hide and travel to the Demon Realm in secret. But no cowards like that lived in the Demon Realm. This was a country of warriors who loved big and bloody battles. What's the point of the pools, then? Obviously, to establish who gets attacked and who gets to do the attacking.

With that established, Core 564 attacked a boldly-waiting pool winner at a nearby tavern, and easily succeeded in taking his medal to earn participation in the Fighter's Tournament. But he couldn't let his identity be revealed, so he called himself the Nameless Swordsman, an expert in Demon King style.

* * *

And then he lost in the tournament.

“Ngggh...! To think that Wataru the Hero himself would be participating...”

Wataru the Hero had joined the Fighter’s Tournament as a guest from the Laverio Empire. That said, Core 564 didn’t lose to him. He lost to Asura—a three-meter-tall, six-armed Giant Arachnoid that fought with both bows and swords. She was the daughter of a Giant and an Arachnoid. With her array of weaponry it felt like fighting three people at once. She was strong enough that she could potentially reach the third fight of even the Hell Tournament, depending on the matchups.

Unfortunately, she lost in her next fight to Wataru, and ultimately the Fighter’s Tournament ended with Wataru’s victory.

“However, if I had not worn Asura down, it no doubt would have been a closer fight. That means my fight with Asura was the true grand finals! Ahahaha... haaah.”

As an aside, victors of battle were healed of their exhaustion and sent to their next fight in peak condition, on the Great Demon King’s honor. The healer who looked after Asura and Wataru could guarantee that they had indeed fought at the peak of their strength.

“...The silver lining in this disaster is that due to the perfection of my disguise, nobody knows that I lost in the Fighter’s Tournament before even getting an opportunity to reach the Hell Tournament.”

And so Core 564’s last road to the Hell Tournament came to a subdued close. His plans had been so filled with the Hell Tournament that he decided to just spend the remainder of his break sleeping or something.

“Sigh. Perhaps I should begin a journey...”

The Hell Tournament came to a close, but Core 564 was still just sleeping. Mikan was still busy with his own stuff, so he had sent word that Core 564 could extend his break a bit. Core 564 replied that if he was that busy, maybe he should help, but Mikan faltered and replied that it wasn’t *that* kind of business. It felt like Mikan’s dungeon just didn’t have a place for Core 564.

* * *

A lot happened after that, with the end result being Keima calling Core 564

over. He could have just sent word given that they were both in the Demon Realm and well within walking distance, but instead he went through the efforts of faking a Dungeon Battle to get a portal between them.

“I see, you wish to borrow my power. And if I were to refuse?”

“Mikan, give him an order.”

“Core 564, you have to obey them!”

Intense pain shot through Core 564, making him agonize with pain like electricity was shooting through him.

“Nghaaaaah! I understand, I understand! So, what do you wish for me to do?” It turned out that he wanted Core 564 to help him fight Core 50, the star of the Demon Realm. “Hm...? Duel Core 50?! I see! The truth is, I am quite the fan of Core 50, and in fact I adopted this manner of speech out of admiration for him. I eve—”

“Let me just stop you right there. It sounds like you’re about to rant, and I really don’t care.”

Keima proceeded to explain to Core 50 the strategy he wanted him to help in.

“When I take you out of {Storage}, I want you to hit him with this wooden sword as quickly as you can.”

“Come again? I have my own Magic Blade, you know,” Core 564 began, but Keima opened up {Storage} without giving him any time to protest. “And, ah, wait, you can put sentient things in {Storage}? That is news to me...”

He was thrust into a pitch-black page, so dark that even closing one’s eyes seemed to be brighter somehow.

—...I can see nothing!— he yelled, but he couldn’t even hear his own voice. What in the world?

—Keima! Let me out of here!— he yelled again, but he still couldn’t hear anything. It was unlikely that he could be heard outside of {Storage} either. In which case, he was stuck there forever, until Keima decided to take him out. What a cruel thing to do.

...It was kinda scary, too. But Cores didn’t need to use the bathroom or

anything, and without performing intense exercise he wouldn't need oxygen either. He kept repeating to himself that he wouldn't die here.

...If he had known this would happen, he would have taken Demon King style more seriously and mastered the art of not breathing, as well as the techniques to clean one's heart of fear. Core 564 was awash with regret.

He could at least still feel his hands and legs, so he groped around for stuff... and found something woody. What was it? He felt it further and found that it was a wooden blade other than the one he had been given. It was probably a spare. Further investigation revealed several more, so he decided to just go ahead and hold one in his right hand. He was left-handed, by the way.

He stepped in something squishy. It was some kind of bread roll. He couldn't recognize the smell, but that's what it felt like. He took an experimental bite and tasted the flavor of sweet wheat. It was freshly baked.

There was a round orb as well. Core 564 stroked it and found it familiar. Apparently it was a Dummy Core. Two, actually. What was the point in storing Dummy Cores here instead of in the dungeon? Either way, Core 564 found a possible avenue of escape and pushed his hand against the orbs in hopes of going inside, only for his wooden sword to be sucked inside. It just disappeared out of his hands. What was the meaning of that? Either way, he didn't sweat it since there were still other wooden swords. The one he had been given was just inside the Dummy Core now.

Core 564, enjoying himself, investigated further. He waved a hand around, only to feel a stabbing pain.

—Ngh! What's stabbing me?! That hurts!—

It seemed he had touched some kind of sharp blade. One wrong move and he would have cut off his entire finger. And no matter how loud he wailed, he still couldn't hear himself. Core 564 gave up his exploring, now knowing that there were dangerous things in this {Storage}.

Core 564 carefully sat down in a safe-seeming place. It felt kind of like he had returned to where he had initially been placed. {Storage} didn't provide that wide of a space anyway. If he tried laying down to rest, he would hit all sorts of dangerous things.

His grasp of time started to weaken before long. There was no light, no sound, and no smells. He could feel and taste, however, so he stroked the Dummy Core and nommed on the bread roll to keep himself sane.

* * *

With nothing else to do, Core 564 focused on visualizing the moment he struck Core 50 to prepare himself. If he came out like this, he would swing to the left. If he instead came out like so, he would stab forward. He felt his senses get honed amid the dark, cramped, silent space. Indeed. It felt as if something was building up deep within his nose.

—Wait, no! I’m not crying! I’m not!—

He had already lost all sense of time. It felt as if only an hour had passed since he entered this place, but at the same time it felt as if he had spent an entire year there. Neither option was better than the other. They were both terrible. If only an hour had passed, he would be stuck here for seventy times as long as he already had been. If a year had passed, it was likely he had been forgotten entirely, and he would spend the rest of eternity in this darkness.

Hopefully it was just the third day already.

And that was when some light shone in the space-time. He felt himself being pulled out—it was time. Core 564 stood up, his chest full of purpose.

It had been so long since he had last seen light that it hurt his eyes. It was all he could do to just thrust his sword as fast as possible. Clink.

He opened his eyes and saw that the sword in his left hand had hit Core 50’s left foot.

“Bwaahaaaah! Did you see that, Keima?! I did iiiiiiit!” The roars of a Baphomet echoed throughout the dungeon.

And so, Core 564 accomplished the incredible feat of landing a blow on Core 50. He looked toward Keima smugly, seeking approval, but Keima looked just as shocked as anyone.

“Hold it! Why are you surprised too?! Don’t tell me you forgot I was in there!” Core 564 yelled. He forgave Keima since he praised him for his efforts later.

Moving on. Core 564 didn't accomplish much after that, but even so, he was one of the three people out of the entire crowd of challengers that struck Core 50. Despite being an outcast, he received Core 50's praise and was invited to his dinner table as a guest.

"Ah, it's been so long since I've had steak udon! And this is Flame Hydra meat, my favorite! I feel my power swelling!"

Steak and udon were both beloved by all Demon Realm citizens. Not to mention, Core 50 was an excellent host that allowed his guests as many servings as they would like.

"I shall eat until my stomach bursts! Nom nom, nom nom... More! I ask for seco—"

His vision suddenly shifted. In the blink of an eye, a familiar orange rabbit was standing in front of him.

"Oh, there you are. Sheesh, your job for Keima finished yesterday, didn't it? How long are you planning on slacking off? Well, anyway! I finally have some work for you!"

Core 564, in all his wisdom, instantly figured out what had happened.

"...MY STEAK UDOOOOON!"

His wails echoed throughout the rabbit paradise. It was a scream of the soul that would later be used as a warning signal for when the upcoming raid event had mini boss monsters in them.

Extra Episode — Neruneh's Hypnosis

I cooked up several plots to land hits on Core 50, but I was also planning out a full-frontal attack as well. That was a last resort, naturally, but it would be a big mistake to not plan around it at all.

That meant I needed to plan counters for his mind-reading abilities. Aidy, Sebas, and Niku could all use Detachment thanks to their Demon King style training, but Wataru didn't have the time to learn Demon King style, and he didn't already know any skills that would help out there.

"So, Wataru. I'm thinking about hypnotizing you. Mind helping out?"

"Hypnotizing me?"

In short, I just had to make him go berserk so Core 50 couldn't read his mind. If we could make him go berserk at any time we wanted, well, he probably wouldn't have any mind to read.

"I really don't think hypnosis will work on me."

"Don't worry, we Beddhists are professionals at sleep. The hypnosis will work for sure, if you let it happen."

"If you're confident, well, alright. Are you going to cast the hypnosis? Since you're the pope and all?"

"Not a chance in hell."

Naturally, the hypnosis would involve using Kosaki the Succubus ring for charms. Succubus charms were very useful and effective for all sorts of things, including memory manipulation, but my Succuma form was simply too powerful. It ran the risk of negatively influencing my relationship with Wataru for the rest of our lives. I would never forget the slum criminals taking one look at me and deducing that I was Succuma.

"So, who'll be doing the hypnosis, then?"

"Neruneh. You'd rather her be doing the hypnosis than me, right?"

“For sure. If I have a choice here, I’d pick Neruneh every time.”

It’s good to be honest. And so, I had Neruneh undergo the Succubus transformation this time.

As an aside, in the past Neruneh could only transform into a Succubus for very brief amounts of time, but through practice and experience she managed to stretch out the transformation time significantly. She framed her accomplishment as such: “Now I’m a lewd giiiirl.” (According to Kosaki, something was off about the transformation, but it was better than it used to be, so it was probably fine... I didn’t ask for the details.)

“Hey, Neruneh. You can come in.”

“Okaaay.”

Neruneh entered the room in her usual maid outfit, wearing the Succubus ring. She hadn’t transformed yet. Which reminded me of something important.

“Wataru. If you have any magic tools that give mental resistance or something, take ’em off. Those will definitely stop this from working.”

“Oh, right. Haku did give me some kinda strengthening bracelet to wear,” Wataru said before taking off his Lionheart Bracelet with a ‘clink’ and putting it into {Storage}. It would be a big problem if her Hero was Charmed into joining the enemy, so Haku had naturally planned ahead. “By the way, Keima. If we’re going to be doing this, I’ve always wanted to try one of those things where a person goes beyond their human limits due to hypnosis. Can you make that happen?”

“Huh? Er, probably.” They did say that human bodies had limiters to stop us from destroying ourselves.

“Alright, how about we split it into two stages, with signals to activate each. The first will be a berserk mode that makes you think about nothing but destroying the enemy in front of you, which we’ll be using for the fight. The second will be the limiter-canceling mode.”

“Oh, so I can activate it by shouting Limits: Off or something? That’s cool! Yeah, let’s go with that!”

“For berserk mode, the signal can be Berserk: Activate. For safety’s sake we’ll set it so you go back to normal if you pass out or Neruneh tells you to stop.”

“Oh, you can make adjustments that precise?”

Absolutely. I knew because I had done a lot of hypnosis experiments on the criminals with Niku back then.

“Okay. Let’s have Mission: Complete be the code word for putting the limiters back on.”

“You sure are enjoying this, huh?”

“Okaaaay. I’m going to start the hypnosis nooooow. Relaaaax, and look this waaaay. You are getting veeery, veeery sleeeepy.” Neruneh let a Beddhist holy symbol sway side to side in front of Wataru’s face as he sat in a chair. I had based the design on a five yen coin, so it was pretty much a traditional hypnosis coin. Neruneh’s relaxing drawl washed over us like the waves of hypnosis, seeping into our bodies and... *Whoa, I almost fell asleep.* Talk about power. She hasn’t even transformed into a Succubus yet.

“Possess,” Neruneh said just as Wataru was starting to drift off, transforming into a Succubus. *Oh, and just to be clear, I was borrowing the Divine Lionheart Bracelet from Rokuko so I wouldn’t be Charmed myself.*

“N... N-N-Neruneh...? Is it just me, or, uh, a-are you showing a lot of skin...?”



“Hmmm? Maybe the hypnosis is making you see thiiings? What does it look like I’m weariiiiing?”

“S-S-S-Something very, very perverted... Ah! Keima, don’t look!” Wataru yelled, falling into a panic.

“What’re you talking about? She seems normal to me. Seems like the hypnosis is already doing a number on you, Wataru.”

“W-Wait, really?! This is the hypnosis...?! God, hypnosis is incredible!”

She seemed like a normal Succuneh (Succubus Neruneh) to me, with her normal skimpy outfit. I told no lies.

“I seeeee. Deep down you want me to wear a pervy outfiiiiit, Wataruuu? Okaaay. Ahahaaah.”

Succuneh advanced forward toward Wataru. She had entered the corruption phase of the charming process. Succuma could forcibly charm people due to being a Queen-rank Succubus, but Neruneh was apparently just at the level of a standard Succubus, so this was necessary for her.

“Do you like belly buttooons? Do you want to touch it? Go aheaaad, I don’t miiind.”

“Ah, ah, aaaaah!” Wataru groaned. He already liked Neruneh, so I could imagine this was like a sledgehammer to his psyche. His cheeks were bright red. *Seems kinda like he’s already fallen.*

“Neruneh, try it.”

“Okaaay. Wataruuu, I have a requeeeest.”

“Er, y-yeah? What is it?”

“I want to see what happeeens if you remove the limiters in your braaaain.”

“Ngh, uh, th-that’s... I would like to show you, if I could, but...” Wataru faltered, but ultimately still refused, thinking it impossible for him.

Ehhh. That’s a sign the charming isn’t complete. He would never say that if he were charmed. I happen to be an expert on this subject.

“Neruneh. Step two.”

“Riiight. What do I need to do for you to show meee? Should I lick iiiit?”

“L-L-Lick it?! Lick iiiit?!”

Neruneh pressed her body against his, forcing him to be aware of her soft female figure. She gently caressed him all over with gentle hands, touching but almost not quite.

“Do you like being tickleeed? How perverteeed.”

“Eep?!”

She was whispering into his ear.

“...You want me to keep whispeeering? Ahaha, you’re so greeeedy. Fwoooo.”

“Ah, ah, ah!”

He trembled when she blew in his ear. *Actually... Why am I even watching Wataru being a pervert? I think I’m just gonna let Neruneh handle this.*

“Neruneh, can I leave the rest to you?”

“Uh-huuuuh, it’ll be fiiine. I have Kosaki with meee.”

“Alright. Good luck, then.”

I left the room with Neruneh waving me goodbye. *Have fun, you two.*

* * *

And so, the hypnosis was complete.

“Good work, Wataru. How was being hypnotized?”

“...I don’t really remember much about it for some reason, but I feel really, really strong. Blood is almost spraying out of my nose.”

“Want me to grab a handkerchief?”

Just to be safe we had erased his memories about the Succubus stuff, which meant he shouldn’t remember anything after the swaying coin. The berserk and limiter-removing techniques were ingrained deep within his subconscious thanks to the charms.

“Limits: Off...! Whoa, wow, this is kinda incredible. I can already feel the power boost.”

“Try not to go too far and destroy your body, alright?”

“Mission: Compleete,” Neruneh intoned, which put Wataru back to normal.

“Oh, can I put my bracelet back on now?”

“Hm? Uh, huh...” Now that he mentions it, I’m not sure if the hypnosis (charms) will go away if he puts on anti-charm equipment once they’re in place. We should probably experiment a little.

And so he put on the bracelet so we could perform some relatively safe experiments with his no-limits mode.

...Yep. Seems like the modes won’t activate when he has the bracelet on, but they work when he takes it off. You learn something new every day.

Alright, now it’s time to have him try out the berserk function on Aidy. It would be pretty scary if it just didn’t work when the time came.

“Go ahead and let loose. We’ve got {Healing}.”

“You got it!”

It would also serve as Aidy’s payment for helping us. She would have to take the full brunt of his berserk attacks, but it would be worse for it to not do any damage when it matters most. *Sorry, Aidy! We all have rough days sometimes.*

Afterword

Thus concludes Volume 13, the Demon Realm arc...! Hm? It's totally different from the web novel? Yeah, well, they went to the Demon Realm at a different time and went with different people, so it kind of had to end up different. That said, even I'm impressed by how different it ended up being. And I thought this time for sure there wouldn't be too many changes... I guess you just can't tell these things until you start writing.

And with that, I would like to thank the proofreader, Youta-sama, and I-san the editor for working so hard to accommodate this volume during their busy schedules. I would also like to thank everyone who so kindly read this book. The world is in a pretty bad state right now, and I hope it provided at least a little solace for you. Uh... though maybe that's unlikely, since this was a pretty violent volume.

Anyway, I guess I'll dump some lore about a character who was slightly more important in the web novel than the light novel. I'm talking about the one and only Abover Aes, a guy with a last name despite the fact that hunters in the Demon Realm can't become nobles since only demons are nobles. His name quite literally comes from the phrase "I am above your eyes." He's the rival of Extraorc (from extraocular muscle), and he's a pretty solid fighter. His magic spear Protrube comes from "protuberance." I would guess that basically nobody noticed, but the joke is that you can't see protuberances above your eyes, so the spear is invisible. Yeaaah. Nobody noticed that. Which is why I'm explaining it here, far past the point of it being relevant.

Anyway, putting aside that pointless junk... This volume had a ton of action scenes in it, which is what happens when you visit a country where you say hello by trying to stab someone's back. It was actually a pretty hard volume for me to write, since I'm bad at describing action. To think I would end up writing this much new content and introducing so many new fight scenes, all because the Demon Realm demands that much fighting...

While Keima's party was getting a ton of exercise out there, I spent this year's Golden Week lazing around in bed, writing, and making cute AI girls sing using software. As for my weight... well, I didn't get any heavier, but I can imagine that some of my muscles turned to fat. That's what me getting out of breath walking to the supermarket would imply, anyway. I should learn from Keima and eat a bunch of udon while exercising, then get a bunch of comfy sleep.

Incidentally, I'm working at home at the time of me writing this afterword, but I'm not entirely sure I'll be able to go back to working five days a week at the company like I used to. Oh well. I'll work for the sake of continuing to write LDM, and focus on building up "laziness power," which is also known as "avoiding reality energy."

May we meet again in the next volume.

Supana Onikage

Bonus Short Stories

Fun with Making Udon

Demon Realm cuisine was nothing if not representative of its culture. Many recipes introduced by Ishidaka the Hero had been arranged to suit their tastes, and then magically modified further to better suit their training.

“And so, today we shall make udon,” Core 50 announced.

“...Er, alright, but what’s with this shield?” Keima asked, wielding a sizable greatshield given to him by Core 50.

“This is an udon-creation tool of my own design, known as the udon dough kneading shield!”

On closer inspection, Keima discovered there was a bag of udon dough set right in the middle of the shield.

“...Okay, I’ll bite. Why is there udon dough on the shield?”

“I’m glad you asked! By blocking powerful blows, with it on the shield, you will have thoroughly kneaded dough perfect for making delicious udon when the battle is done!” Core 50 replied, puffing up his armored chest with pride. It really seemed like any direct blow from Core 50 would pulverize the dough into bits.

“Can’t you just deflect attacks with shields?”

“That would be the idea with bucklers, but greatshields are designed for taking attacks head-on. That is just common sense,” Core 50 said, swaying a chastising finger. It was true that the whole point of a greatshield was to provide complete defense, and one didn’t really use them to deflect attacks.

“Keima, this doubles as defensive training for you. You must block the attack without dodging.”

“Oof. In that case, how about you give me the Divine Pajamas if I successfully

block the attack?”

“Hah! That shall remain your reward for defeating me in a duel, I say!”

And so, I was given the job of helping him make udon... in the form of defensive training with a shield.

“Now, ready the shield. Be certain to brace your legs firmly.”

Keima readied the shield as ordered, bracing his legs as if using his entire body as a post to prop it up. “Don’t hit too hard! Let’s just see how a light blow goes first!”

“Certainly. One light blow. Surely this will be enough,” Core 50 said, tossing out a visibly slow punch. It did seem to be pretty harmless. Getting hit by that would probably just push him back a little. “Light, lliight... HYAH!”

“Ngh?!”

Keima letting his guard down had been a mistake. The blow sent shockwaves that pierced the shield, and upon letting go of the shield in surprise Keima was sent flying back. The shield, having lost its user, remained behind as if stuck to Core 50’s hand.

“A-Are you well?! I accidentally used an armor-piercing technique!”

“I thought I was going to die, but I’m somehow alive. Can I rest now?”

“You are alive and have no wounds, I see! Then we can continue without issue!”

Nah, nah, that’s definitely the kind of attack that gives internal damage to organs and stuff, Keima thought while casting {Healing} on himself.

“...Would you survive if I sped up my punches? The udon dough will never get kneaded at this rate,” Core 50 mused. It seemed that exactly none of the shockwaves had gone through the udon dough, somehow.

“Okay, but do a normal punch this time, please! Just hit it normally!”

“Quite. Now, take this... HYAH!”

Keima, feeling uneasy about the attack, dodged to the side—leaving the shield behind to explode into a thousand pieces despite being made of metal...

or rather, perhaps it had exploded *due* to being made out of metal. Either way, Keima was relieved to know his unease had been right on the money.

“Why are you running?! You will learn nothing this way!”

“I think that shattered shield explains why I would run away well enough! Didn’t you say you would just hit it normally?! You liar!”

“I-I did not lie! I merely vibrated my fist rapidly during the punch! Hrm... I suppose the shield simply wasn’t strong enough?”

“Why did you vibrate your fist?!”

“It occurred to me that doing so would knead the udon better!”

Just as Keima was about to say that blasting the udon dough away couldn’t possibly work well, the bag of udon descended after having been knocked impossibly high into the sky. Core 50 caught it with one hand.

“Very well. The udon dough survived the blast, luckily, so you may use it as a shield directly.”

“...Hold on a second. Why is that bag so durable?”

“Hm? Of course it would be durable. Wasting food must be avoided at all costs.” Thus, they used durable sandbag covers to hold udon dough. It was a special kind of leather bag made from the hides of Earth Lizards and Ground Slimes, both monsters famed for their durability.

“...Why not just go ahead and make a full set of armor out of bags like that and udon dough?”

“Oooh! Now that is a brilliant idea! Once it is ready, we shall experiment.”

Keima had just tossed out the suggestion without giving it much thought, but due to his status at the moment he couldn’t ask Core 50 to test the armor on someone else. All he could do was smile uncomfortably.

Luckily for him, the udon dough armor wasn’t completed while Keima was still on his Demon Realm trip. Whether someone else was sacrificed and permanently maimed in his stead, nobody knows.

Meanwhile at the Dining Hall

Visitors continued eating at the Dancing Doll Inn's dining hall even while Keima was at the Demon Realm.

"Yooo, Kinue. Could I catch two D-Rank meals?"

"Certainly. And... done."

Ichika and Kinue were left at home and working like always.

"Sigh. I really wonder what Master and the others are doing in the Demon Realm right now," Ichika wondered aloud.

"I can't wait to try out Demon Realm food," Kinue replied, both of them using a break in the flow of customers to think about Keima and the others on the trip.

"To be real for a sec, I really woulda liked eating the food where it's sold. The atmosphere's basically part of the flavor, you feel me?"

"The atmosphere...?"

"Yuppers. The air's got flavor too, y'know. Guess it's hard for you to get since you're basically the furthest thing from a traveler," Ichika said, then sighed.

"...I could travel if I wished, to be clear. I could leave right now if I wanted."

"Hm?"

"I am a spirit of homes—a Silky. I remain here only because I love being home," Kinue said with a pout. Ichika blinked in surprise.

"Oh, wow, this is rare. I dunno if I've ever seen you pissed like this before, Kinue."

"I am simply angry that you would suggest I couldn't be a traveler."

"Not really sure why that's what would set you off, though," Ichika replied while scratching her cheek. "I guess that means you actually do want to travel somewhere?"

"No, we Silkies do so only when we are in search of a home to inhabit. It would be best for me not to travel unless my home is destroyed or I'm expelled

from here.”

“So I was right, you’re the furthest thing from a traveler. Why’d you get mad?”

“Perhaps I just wanted to see what it felt like?” Kinue replied with her usual smile. Ichika snorted. “But putting those jokes aside, I truly could travel to the Demon Realm and return in a day’s time if I wished.”

Ichika blinked in surprise again. “Whoa, a single day? That’s sure something else.”

“Oh, do you not believe me? It’s the truth. I only noticed recently, but I actually have a skill which makes that possible. Though I’d rather not use it without an order from Master.”

“Sounds neat. Gimme the deets,” Ichika said, leaning forward. Kinue smiled and answered.

“I could use my {Chef} skill to stop time and walk.”

“Oof... now that’s not something I want to think about doing.”

The logic was simple. The {Chef} skill which Kinue possessed stopped time while she was cooking. During that time she couldn’t do anything except cook, but moving around was included in cooking—though she was limited to just walking.

“Does the skill really cover distances that long?”

“It’s true that I might only be capable of moving within an area related to cooking. I haven’t experimented enough to be sure,” Kinue replied, rethinking things. “At the very least, I know time remains stopped when I visit storerooms for ingredients, but I haven’t tried going outside of the town.”

“Want to try it, then? I sure wanna eat something made with fresh fish from the Pavella sea,” Ichika said casually, earning a dissatisfied frown from Kinue.

“No. Certainly not. What if that were to force me to enter the sea itself to gather fish?”

“You could just buy some from Dragg’s stores... oh, wait, you can’t really buy stuff when time’s stopped.”

“Thievery certainly is wrong. Also, I cannot use the tunnel Master made when time is stopped.”

It might have worked if the tunnel through Tsia Mountain had just been a normal hole, but there was the toll wall. It couldn't be used while time was stopped.

“Furthermore, although time is stopped, I would physically be leaving my home for potentially several days. My instincts as a Silky will not allow me to do that without Master or Rokuko firmly asking me to do so.”

“...Makes sense. Guess I can understand that,” Ichika replied, resting her chin on her hands with an elbow on the counter. “Anyway, I wonder what kinda stuff they're gonna bring back for us.”

“I'm quite looking forward to that myself. Though... have you never been to the Demon Realm, Ichika?”

“Nope, I'd never risk my pretty ass there. They'd kill me in no time.”

Ichika was an excellent scout, but not much of a warrior. Her only option if challenged to a duel would be to high-tail it out of there. Though that was exactly why she had wanted to use this opportunity to travel with Keima and eat the food there safely.

“Y'know, that reminds me. Seems like in Master's world, they had, like, some kinda canned air they could bring back from trips.”

“Canned... Ah, yes, the preserved foods. I've seen them in the DP Catalog before. But they can air as well? That sounds fascinating.”

“I know, right? I'd kill for some canned Demon Realm air and food... It'd be like I was there myself. Oh, a customer.”

And so, Keima's inn remained lively even while he wasn't there, with the staff and customers always chatting about one thing or the other.

Meanwhile at the Beddhist Church

Maiodore returned to Tsia while Keima's group was at the Demon Realm, but every three days she returned to Goren. Her excuse for visiting the town

despite her fiancée being absent was to study Beddhism at the church. Bonodore the archduke firmly advised she do so, and he even asked her to borrow any high-quality books related to farming if she could.

But in reality, Maiodore was just chilling with her head resting on one of the church's desks. Her manners were so poor that it was easy to imagine her mother Waltz throwing a fit at the sight of her. She was at least wearing commoner clothes to disguise herself, but there weren't many children in Goren, and, in fact, enough people knew her face by now that the disguise was entirely pointless.

"I'm ever so boored."

"Y'sure about that, Mai? Shouldn't you be studying?" Michiru, a child working as an apprentice nun in the Beddhist church, said.

"Oh, it's fine. I already finished studying for the day."

"Okay! All good, then! Beddhism teaches us that we should finish our annoying work ASAP and get right to sleeping!" Michiru said, puffing out her flat chest with pride, as if happy with herself for being able to tie things into a Beddhist lesson.

"...Is it just me, or have your clothes gotten thinner again? Your nun outfits always seem to get thinner and thinner. They're almost transparent now."

"Mm? I mean, duh. Thinner clothes are a lot easier to move around in, so."

Of course, Michiru was a Succubus, despite how she looked. The lewd energy that radiated from a Succubi's body seeped into the clothes they wore daily, transforming them into something lewder over time.

"I shall tell Father to send another batch of newly-made nun outfits."

"Um... yaaay? Thanks, Mai?" Michiru's not-so-happy gratitude made Maiodore laugh.

That was when a visitor arrived at the church. He was a child, but he strode to Maiodore and Michiru with a confident gait.

"Getting quite slovenly there, aren't we Lady Mai?"

"Ah, Lord Cid... Pay it no mind. This is a Beddhist church, remember. Being

slovenly here is just good manners.”

It was Cid, the town chief of Dragg and the next archduke of Pavella. He too was wearing a commoner’s outfit.

“Still, aren’t you exposing yourself a bit too much?”

“Oh my, thank you for your concern, but I have a bodyguard hidden behind me to ensure my safety. Not that anyone would dare perform mischief in a Beddhist Church.” Maiodore glanced at a nearby nun, who smiled back at her.

“Ah... Yeah, that makes sense. Even the nuns at our town make a show of any criminals...”

Beddhist nuns allowed no wrongdoing within their churches. They could sense even one’s most private intentions to act selfishly, and in the blink of an eye they would be right by your side, directing an enrapturing smile your way. It was entirely as if they could predict what one intended to do simply by observing.

...And since the Beddhist nuns were in fact all Succubi, they were sensitive to the lusts of men. Keima had entrusted them with watching over the churches as nuns, and they were *far* surpassing his expectations there. (And since he had explicitly given permission for them to feast on book thieves, they would intentionally let people steal books just so that they could legally capture them minutes later.)

“Good grief. Where in the world did Sir Keima find such skilled nuns...? I would like him to use his connections to find me world-class subordinates as well.”

“I’m sure he would if you asked.”

“...I was just kidding. If I got any more in debt to him, I will be paying him back for my entire life.”

“Oh my, I see.”

Cid shook his head as he sat down next to Maiodore.

“So, so, what’re you doing here, Cid? Why not just go to your own town’s church?” Michiru asked, sitting down in front of Cid’s desk and making eye

contact with him.

“...Now that is a good question,” Maiodore interjected. “Why go through all the effort of passing through the tunnel to visit Goren? Surely you know that both Keima and Kuro are absent at the moment?”

“Hrm? Ah, yes. I... I suppose I just wanted to visit. It’s been a bit since I’ve last seen Michiru.”

“Oooh?” Maiodore smiled, putting a hand over her mouth.

“Hey, don’t read into that! M-Michiru and I are just friends, that’s all. Right, Michiru?”

“Right! Cid and I are just friends, nothing more...! ...Wait, what? Why are you getting all sad now?”

“Erm, nothing.” Cid floundered awkwardly for a moment, and upon seeing that Michiru felt as if she had just taken a bite of something delicious.

“I get it! Thanks for coming to see me, Cid!” she smiled a blossoming smile, making Cid blush. Maiodore couldn’t help but giggle at how easy to understand he was being.

“I see, I see. I understand everything now, Lord Cid.”

“Wh-What’s that supposed to mean?!”

“Hm? Isn’t she just saying you came to see me as a friend, Cid? I-Is that wrong?”

“E-Er, no, that’s exactly right. Yeah.”

At that point Maiodore actually burst into real laughter.

Off to the side, Suilla the head nun was watching. “Hmm... That seems to be Michiru’s true feelings. Perhaps she needs more training... or perhaps honesty is her greatest weapon,” she murmured, and her whispers faded into the air without anyone ever hearing them.

Become My Master!

“Scuse me, do you have a sec?”

“Hm...? O-Oh, it’s you! You’re the king of the rabbits, right?”

Our scene shifts to the [Rabbit Paradise], a distant dungeon. An adventurer named Rinnew who was a regular there turned after being spoken to, only to find an orange-colored rabbit. She instantly recognized him thanks to his clothes and crown.

“That’s right! I’m Mikan, the boss of this [Rabbit Paradise]! And um, there’s something I wanna talk to you about, Rinnew.”

“Really? Me?”

“Yup! I can’t say this to anyone else, so how about we go somewhere less public?”

Mikan started hopping away. Rinnew followed.

“E-Er, Mr. King, how far are we going to go?”

“Just a bit further. Don’t worry, it’ll all be okay.”

Mikan kept hopping on without worry. They passed through the grassland room and reached the part of the dungeon where enemies spawned. Rinnew timidly stepped inside, passing the gate that had been set up so nobody could wander in carelessly.

A bit further on there was a small room with a door, which had a smaller door in it for rabbits to go through.

“I’m baaack,” Mikan said, entering the room through the lower door. Rinnew hesitated a bit, not sure if she should follow, which prompted Mikan to tell her to hurry on inside.

“E-Excuse meee... Whoa!”

Upon timidly opening the door, she found an enormous crowd of Soldier Rabbits, Horned Rabbits, and all sorts of other rabbit-type monsters. She instinctively reached for her weapon, but stopped since they showed no hostility. Mikan was casually taking off his crown to sit on a cushion. Not to mention, monsters or not, they were still rabbits, and they had the clean fur that all the white rabbits had. Rinnew dare not harm them.

“Feel free to sit.”

“R-Right.”

Rinnew sat on the cushion offered to her. For a second she shifted on the squishy softness, but before long it felt great and she relaxed on top of it.

“That’s called a bead cushion. Someone gave it to me as a gift. Pretty nice, huh?”

“Y-Yup. So... wh-what do you want to talk about?”

“Right, right. This is very important!” Mikan exclaimed, looking up at Rinnew while sitting.

.....

“Erm...?”

“...Listen, Rinnew. Are you pals with Ichigo?”

“Ah, um, I think so. I like her as both a fan and as a fellow adventurer.”

“Mm, I hope you two stay friends. Anyway, umm...” Mikan faltered, uncomfortable. It was clear he was trying to say something that took a lot of courage.

“C’mon, you’re like a village girl trying to ask a boy out. Aren’t you a king? Out with it.”

“Right! Y-You’re right!” Mikan gripped his foot. “I’m gonna say it!”

“Yup! Go for it!”

“...I-I’m gonna say it!”

“You’re killing me here! Just say it!”

“W-Will you becwome...!”

He bit his tongue. The Horned Rabbits groaned and poked Mikan with their horns, making fun of him for his mistake.

“Shut it! I-I’m gonna try again!” Mikan swung a paw, sending the Horned Rabbits scattering. Rinnew didn’t know rabbit language, but she could understand what they meant, thanks to the power of her rabbit love.

“Whew. Okay, now... Would you—actually, wait, sorry.” Mikan spun around.

“What?! I’m busy right now! No, er, not in that way... Ngh. Whatever, you just stay on your break!”

He was speaking to the air. Was he talking to some ghost that Rinnew couldn’t see?

“Er, um, sorry about that. Had to talk to a subordinate.”

“A subordinate, huh? Must be rough being a king,” Rinnew said with a nod.

“Uh-huh. Anyway, so, umm, ummm... Would you,” Mikan began again, at which point the door opened.

“Good work today, everyone... Oh! Rinnew! Does this mean you’re on our side now?” Ichigo asked, coming inside. What bad timing.

“I-I’m just about to ask her now! Geez!”

“Ah...! Oh, sorry for interrupting, Mikan!”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. You can rest.”

Mikan faltered again. By this point, Rinnew could obviously guess that Mikan was trying to recruit her for something or other. She could also guess that Ichigo had already been recruited.

“Hm. So you want me to join you in something, huh?”

“Well, pretty much. There’s a lot of secrecy here, but you know.”

“Alright. But y’know, my duty’s already to protect the rabbits here from enemies. Wouldn’t be too big of a difference to help in the frontlines.”

Rinnew had guessed the rest—they were at the frontline base for fighting the enemies. No doubt they had predicted where the next enemies would arise, and this room would serve as the base for holding them back. The rabbits had all been gathered here to stop the waves before everyone else had to get involved.

“Aaah... th-that’s right!”

“You can count on me! I’ll protect all of you!”

“That’s what I’m talkin’ about! Ahaha...”

Mikan covered his face with his feet, not sure what to say. The fact that he didn't say right there that the enemies were actually their allies too, showed that he had only made it harder to recruit Rinnew as his Master, but that's between you and me.

Teach me, Master! A Lesson on Charms

"Masteeer, how do you chaaarm?"

Now that Neruneh had solved the issue of her Succubus transforming ending quickly, I asked her to hypnotize... or rather, to charm Wataru. But she wasn't sure how to do that.

"What do you mean, how? You just put on Kosaki and use {Charm}."

"That's not what I meaaan. What do you physically dooo, to get the {Charm} workiiiing?"

"Physically...? I mean, you figure out what they like, tickle their fetishes, and get them to do what you want."

"But physicallyyyy, what do I dooo?"

I kinda feel like since Wataru already has a thing for Neruneh, he'll just automatically do whatever she wants, but let's see...

"Maybe just try striking cute poses or something?"

"A cute poooose... like thiiis?" Neruneh asked, covering her right eye with her left hand and striking an edgelord chuuni pose with her arms crossed for some reason.

"Do you really think that's cute...?"

"It's an explosion of cuteneeeess," she replied, this time holding up her fists like a boxer with an oddly sharp, serious expression... or rather, maybe more of a smug expression. *Is... Is this really cute...?*

"Anything eeelse?"

"Er, right. Maybe some cute lines?"

"Cute liiiines... Hmm." Neruneh crossed her arms and put a hand over her

mouth in thought. After a pause, she clapped her hands. “As part of the the ancient contract, I shall allow you to become my servant familiar! How about thaaat?”

What ancient contract...? And you'll let him be your familiar...? That's kinda smug.

“By the waaay, since I’m already your familiaaar, Masteeer, I can’t become his familiaaar.”

“Oh... you’re a familiar? I mean, I guess the dungeon contract is something like that.” The bit about the ancient contract might not even be a lie, considering the Dark God’s involvement.

“Ooh, now that you mention iiiit, dungeons are part of an ancient contract toooo.”

“Wait. That’s not what you meant in the first place? What did you mean, then?”

“Of cooourse, I didn’t mean anythiiiing. I just thought it was cuuute.”

What the hell...? I guess that even though she looks like a human, Neruneh really is a monster. Though she might just be an edgelord.

“Anything eeelse?”

“Uhhh. I would say wear cute or sexy clothes, but the Succubus transformation will take care of that, so I guess that just leaves body touching. Might be good to touch him or have him touch you.”

Succubi exuded mystery pheromones from their skin and hair. When I was Succuma a single touch would tear down the walls around a man’s heart, making even the strongest tough guy like a baby in the palm of my hand.

“The only thing is, exposing yourself too much might not be good for an innocent guy like Wataru. You may want to focus on your belly button or something.”

“My belly buttooon? But whyyy?”

“I mean, because Wataru has a belly button fetish.”

Wait. How do I know that...? Is this Succuma's power? Nah, I must have heard that from him when we went bathing together or something. Yeah. That's gotta be it.

"I seeeee. I understand noooow."

"Yup. So yeah, go and charm Wataru for me."

"But waiiit, I don't have enough experieeeeence yet. I think it would help a lot if you were to {Charm} me fiiiirst."

"....."

Neruneh held out the Succubus ring she had been using to practice her transformation.

"Nah, I think this is something you've gotta learn on your o—"

"Master!" Kosaki shouted, tearfully. "Please let me possess you! I feel like I'm going to go crazy from possessing Neruneh so muuuuch! Please, just lemme get inside you and charm Neruneh!"

"Uhhhh..."

"I'll teach her what to do in body and soul once you charm her! If you don't do that, I'll actually go crazy! Please, Master! Let me possess you and turn into the Charming Girl Succuma!"

Don't say that name! I'd seal you away forever if I could!

But despite her jokes Kosaki really did seem at the end of her rope, so I ultimately agreed.

"...Alright. Just this once."

"Yaaay! Thanks, Master! I love yooou! Kissy wissy!"

"Keep the kisses. Oh, and keep this a secret from Rokuko."

"Ahaha, understooood. This is kind of dirty of uuus, isn't iit?" Neruneh grinned.

Nah, nah. I didn't mean that in a cheating way. I just mean that Rokuko is a huge pain in the ass when she gets charmed by Succuma.

...Naturally, it went without saying that after becoming Succuma I swore them to secrecy with the power of charms.

“...By the way. What’s with all that stuff you do to Wataru all the time?”

“Aaah. Ichika taught me about sadism and stuuuuff.”

That should work on him. Really, it's probably the best for him.

She’s not even here, and yet Ichika’s still being useful... What a gal. I should splurge extra on her souvenirs.

In the end, everything went off without a hitch and the hypnosis worked fine. It was all worth it. I have no regrets. None.









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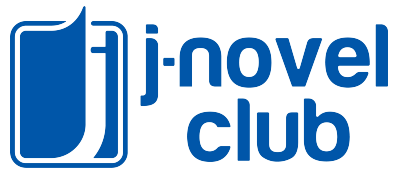
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Lazy Dungeon Master: Volume 13

by Supana Onikage

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